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The Dance of Death
The Bright Messenger, etc.

DUDLEY & GILDEROY

A NONSENSE

by

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

LONDON

ERNEST BENN LIMITED

1929

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To
Mrs. Muir Mackenzie
owner of
DUDLEY
&
Louis N. Parker

Poor birds! What they must suffer from imprisonment in narrow cages in which they cannot even flap their wings, and where they are compelled to sit on a hard smooth perch, far too thick to enable them to grasp it with their toes! No wonder so many of them become irascible and gloomy!

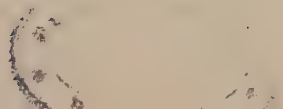
W. T. GREENE.

There was, if we may trust the Arabic chronicles as set down by that devout scholar, Damirei, no cat in the Garden of Paradise.—AGNES REPPLIER.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE CAT LANGUAGE

(Alphonse Leon Grimaldi) . . . *an attempt to prove that the cat is a more delicate organism and of a higher order of intelligence than any other four-footed beast . . . also possesses a language much like the Chinese and possibly derived from it. In the word part of the language there are, probably, not more than* 600 *fundamental words, all others being derivatives.*

G. S. GATES, Ph.D. *The Modern Cat.*



CHAPTER I

The person who imagines that a parrot is a parrot and nothing more will soon find that he or she has made a very great mistake.—W. T. Greene, M.A., M.D., F.Z.S.
The Grey Parrot.

A SUDDEN unexpected sweetness stole over the world that morning in early March. It was as though a day, weary of waiting for its fun and glory, had hopped backwards out of its proper place in May. There was an unwonted softness in the air, a radiance of daffodils, a sound of singing. And with this sweetness about dawn came an invitation to adventure. The blood, even in sleep, ran faster.

The country house in Kent, dreaming among its well-kept gardens, was aware of it, although it gave no demonstrable proof. Too sedate and well-bred to wear its heart upon its sleeve, it yet knew a faint tremor through its ancient timbers. The Manor House, of course, was never taken by surprise; but the garden, romping through every wind-torn spring despite Head Gardeners, registered the thrill. The thrushes noticed it, slipping a wilder whistle through their song, and recent arrivals from Africa followed their example. That "wet, bird-haunted English lawn" missed nothing of importance that came at sunrise, before the noisy humans were abroad to smudge the sensitive beauty. And thus it was that even the back-lawn knew. A flock of those brave things that "come

before the swallow dares and take the winds of March with beauty," these also were aware of the sudden sweetness in the air. That their golden heads turned towards the Manor House is certain. Four keen, wide-open eyes, at any rate, observed them.

Something, apparently, was astir at the unearthly hour of 5.30 a.m., though it was not the human occupants of the Elizabethan building, and assuredly not the servants. Colonel Sir Arthur and his Lady still slept audibly; Molly, their thirteen year old daughter, at the other end of the house, made no move; the younger children, lying in crumpled heaps, equally held steady; the French Governess showed no symptom of *élan*; and the staff, as already mentioned, gave no sign. Yet in the room containing the four keen eyes the message of adventure was recognized and accepted, accepted moreover audibly. Through the window, opened two inches at the top, a strange while not unmusical voice greeted the magic with a couple of words that were distinctly uttered:

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" floated down across the quiet lawns and flower-beds, though no letter to the press had yet announced the arrival of the migrant. "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" the odd voice repeated like an echo. It was not quite the authentic note of the romantic robber-bird, nor was it quite the call of a mechanical clock. It was an individual sound.

The Day Nursery, whence it proceeded, lying away from the rest of the house in the eastern wing, held at this early hour two occupants, neither of

whom slept; one, a biped, denizen of the air; the other, a quadruped, denizen of the world. The speaker was a West African Grey Parrot, a King Grey Parrot, to give him his full title, with red feathers among the grey, and his name was Dudley; the other was a common red-haired cat with a flat-topped skull, and his name was Gilderoy. Dudley belonged to Molly, Gilderoy to himself, and the Day Nursery was their home, the parrot having occupied it for years, the cat for months. It was, at any rate, their headquarters, and a headquarters, sufficiently prolonged, becomes eventually a home. The two animals were very great friends. In appearance, Dudley was dignified, solemn, austere, aristocratic, his sleek feathers glistened, he was extremely *soigné*. Gilderoy was —otherwise.

It was to Dudley and Gilderoy that the invitation to adventure came at the hour of 5.30 a.m. on this sunshiny March morning, and when it came Dudley, as usual, was sedately balanced in the middle of his perch in his big handsome cage, while Gilderoy was just rousing himself from an untidy red ball on the carpet immediately below the table. His head was cocked, his torn ears pointed, his eyes, including the patched one that gave him an appearance of squinting, were wide open. His attitude to his feathered friend was significant—he looked up. While not obsequious, since a cat may assuredly look at a King Parrot, his gaze was respectful and interested. The parrot, on the other hand, though aware he was being stared at, did not return the stare. He looked no-

where in particular. He gazed into space, his face expressionless. His mind, however, was not idle. He was listening.

Each animal, that is, used his predominant faculty, Dudley his acute, amazing ears, Gilderoy his all-seeing, uncanny eyes. What, between them, was neither heard nor seen was usually negligible.

Now Dudley, it must be admitted, was certainly worth looking at. Having lived so many years in the family, he was part of the household, where he was well-fed, well-cared for and well-loved, especially by his owner, Molly. He knew by heart what Molly thought about him, accepting in his modest way all the great qualities she audibly attributed to him. He especially noted the nice, wonderful things she said, about his mind, his soul, his work, for instance. He also knew, since the child studied the book audibly year by year, exactly what Professor Greene thought about him as related in *The Grey Parrot, How to Manage It.* If occasionally he disagreed, audibly, with Professor Greene, he was never at logger-heads with Molly. Greene he sometimes could have nipped, Molly he only kissed. For Molly recognized his greatness. Aware of his sublimity, sure that he was unfathomably wise, "a noble fellow," she was never tired of telling him so.

It was quite natural, therefore, that Dudley knew he was worth looking at this early March morning, as Gilderoy, stretching his skinny legs, peeped up at him. Likewise, he knew that his quadruped friend considered him worth looking at.

If he did not move, it was because he already stood in the mathematical centre of his perch, and at the furthest spot from the wide-spaced bars. Remaining motionless as marble, this being the least succulent stone he could think of, he watched Gilderoy steadily with one bright, glassy eye.

Gilderoy, meanwhile, innocent of all wickedness, proceeded to wash. He was evidently in an affectionate and friendly mood. He was peaceably inclined. For, while he washed, he fell to purring softly, and Dudley, noticing the sound though giving no sign that he did so, presently waddled awkwardly along his perch in his best sideways shuffle and began to peck delicately at his seed-box. He looked, using Molly's words, marvellous, lovely, adorable, and his grace of movement was, he knew quite well, incomparable.

The two pets, thus, betrayed certain of their characteristics, respectively, at the very opening of the coming adventure, and before anything unusual happened at all. Dudley was wise, cautious, critical, philosophical, and as inordinately vain as a great soul has the right to be; Gilderoy, opportunist and *arriviste*, took what came in life, making use of a world he cared nothing about. Aloof, independent, impervious to suggestion, his feeling towards humanity, where Dudley's attitude was one of kindly pity, held a slight disdain. If the parrot was sagacious, tolerant, immensely experienced, his friend, to put it bluntly, was an unprincipled adventurer. Dudley gave it to be understood plainly that what he did not know was not worth knowing; Gilderoy, whose life and

nature were one huge secret, gave to be understood—nothing.

Their friendship was at once a puzzle and delight, both to themselves and others. The parrot had not always appreciated the cat, whose first arrival in the family, indeed, he had deliberately ignored. Somehow the beast did not look what Dudley called "qui' ri'." Gilderoy's appearance certainly left much to be desired. Lean to scragginess, his red coat was shabby. A patch of colour over one side of his flat face gave the impression that one eye looked elsewhere. The flat face, too, could bulge grotesquely when he was excited. Both ears were torn into serrated edges. His whiskers sprayed ungracefully. He was, the Nursery decided, as "common as they make 'em," a phrase Dudley easily mastered, and he wore invariably an unpleasantly hungry look. It was some time, therefore, before the sagacious King Parrot included him in his small circle of trusted friends, a circle the Vicar, for instance, had never entered. And even now, as already seen, his love was tempered by a slight occasional anxiety, due to the fact that he, Dudley, must seem uncommonly appetizing at moments. He took his precautions at these moments. Apart, however, from this touch of insecurity, he adored his friend, though, as will appear later, he could not always approve of him.

Gilderoy, on his part, felt for the King Parrot, a sincere friendship that included a touch of respect as well. Though not, it seems, accepting the bird's own valuation of himself, he admitted to some

indecipherable superiority in him, such perhaps as a quadruped might feel towards a creature that can use the air. He certainly looked up to him. Towards his grim iron mandibles he showed a hint of reverence; they frightened him. Dudley, however, he had soon decided, was old and tough, how old neither he nor anyone else ever knew, how tough he did not ever mean to know. The cat must be acquitted of mere appetite. All great friendships possess deep reserves, and with both cat and parrot these reserves included the delicate point of age. The past was also thus excluded, Gilderoy rarely referring to his earlier life, Dudley being equally reticent about his own. Each respected, as it were, his friend's wild oats.

One important matter, however, while personal in a very intimate sense, was not included in this reserve—the matter of sex. It affected, chiefly, the parrot: Was Dudley a male or female "King" Parrot? Gilderoy, the family as well, remained inquisitive but uninformed, and if Dudley himself knew he declined to disclose his secret. It was often suggested—by the cat, for instance—that he did not know himself. The mystery, at any rate, was left unsolved till the appointed hour; and Gilderoy, in no faintest doubt about his own sex, used his knowledge to set off against the other's superiority.

For he rather resented this superiority. He twitted his friend occasionally. "I have had families," he boasted, strutting with tail proudly erect. To which Dudley's only comment, too cautious to commit himself, was a plain "Ah!"

ıollowed by certain sea-faring nouns and adjectives which may be indicated by "——!" For, in addition to a very large vocabulary and assortment of voices, he possessed the inestimable gift that he could utter "language" so beautifully that it sounded what her ladyship's maid called "reely naice." His "Ah! ——!" given invariably in the Vicar's voice, was thus a peculiarly effective comment, as comments go.

On this particular morning, his ears noting the sparkling message of adventure, he had used Molly's silvery tones. His "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" was, in fact, a signal to his friend on the carpet that something unusual was in the air, and that it was time to be up and doing.

Gilderoy's reply was to stop his washing. He leaped soundlessly upon the table and gazed fixedly at the parrot's smooth and glistening back as the bird pecked delicately at the tiny seeds with his great dark beak. The green eyes held no par-

ticular expression, unless perhaps a glint of admiration; he sat quietly staring at the sleek grey back. The bird indifferently continued his early snack, for in any case he always knew what went on behind him.

This pleasant scene remained undisturbed for some minutes. The least acute observer must have realized the subtle understanding sympathy that existed between the two creatures; the intimacy and affection were obvious. Apart from the slight hint of insecurity already referred to—the caution of the parrot, the suggestion of hooliganism in the cat—the friendship was established upon bedrock. "Deathless friends," Molly had described them, and Dudley accepted the phrase in his big way, as for years he had accepted all the complimentary things Molly said about him. For years he had absorbed like blotting paper her flood of generous praise. His great little heart swelled to bursting with the fine qualities and powers she attributed to him—in his hearing. He learned them by heart, indeed. It cost him as little effort to remember "deathless friendship," as that his occasional long silences were due to absorption in the profoundest problems of philosophy and life because he was "at Work."

It was after some five minutes' of breakfast that he presently broke in with a further remark, but this time not an audible remark. Both creatures were adept in the art of creating an impression, of conveying meaning by silence, attitude and gesture. Impressions thus produced are an eloquent form of communication; and if Gilderoy could not

always catch the precise sense of the spoken word, he never failed to interpret the attitude, as it were, that framed them.

Thus Dudley, using the form of intercourse his friend could not possibly misunderstand, offered his remark, without even turning round. His eyes glanced sideways.

"I am tired of this dowdy room," he announced.

Though he undoubtedly understood, the cat made no immediate rejoinder. Unlike humans, who cannot support a moment's silence in conversation and would rather all talk simultaneously than endure a pause, these animals appreciated intervals and practised them. Long pauses would separate question and answer; a statement might wait half an hour before the comment it elicited. And several minutes now passed in unbroken silence, yet without a sign of such embarrassment as humans know. Dudley's attitude was: "What I have said I have said." The cat, still sitting close to the cage, fell to washing himself again. He purred. A hind leg pointed like a ramrod at the ceiling. Then, presently, he interrupted his washing and looked up with a sudden jerk. The patched eye appeared to be gazing through the window, but actually was fixed on his friend's back. His wireless whiskers twitched:

"Let's go," he replied. He kept one paw hanging emphatically in the air.

Like many important events in life, the adventures of Dudley and Gilderoy had this simple and spontaneous origin. There was no fuss, no

elaborate preparation. Sniffing the air, the cat began to knead the table-cloth with all four feet. The bird waddled slowly back to the centre of his perch and thence laboriously stepped down to the floor of the cage. His beak, with its free-moving upper mandible, clutched the bars. The stillness of the house was now broken by distant sounds of thumping on the floor upstairs. A door banged heavily. The servants, perhaps, were getting up. It was time to act. Gilderoy opened the latch of the cage skilfully with one velvet paw. The door stood wide. They waited, staring at it. Dudley cocked an eye.

Gilderoy jumped down upon the carpet.

The parrot's moment of hesitation passed. He stalked clumsily sideways through the open door, and a few seconds later, using beak and claws, he descended the table leg and reached the carpet beside his friend. The creatures stood gazing at one another in silence. It was an important, even a dramatic, moment. Who was to lead the way? Whoever went first would, of course, be first to meet the dangers.

"You look best from behind," observed Gilderoy admiringly. "Your back view, I consider, is lovely."

Dudley preened himself.

Moving forward very slowly, he turned towards the Nursery door, leading the way with complete self-confidence.

CHAPTER II

The Grey Parrot in captivity is a veritable proteus . . . a very sensitive creature . . . with surprising sharpness of intellect. . . . It is intensely sociable in disposition, and will mope if left much to its own society.—W. T. GREENE.

THE servants, who had thumped the floor and banged a door, having evidently thought better of it and gone back to bed, the biped and quadruped left the Day Nursery and walked along the passage to the top of the staircase without the smallest difficulty or interruption. Where they meant to go was not yet clear. The first move, at any rate, was to get out of the house.

Side by side, they descended the broad stairs, crossed the great empty hall, still dark and smelling unpleasantly of stale tobacco, and went quietly along the corridor that led towards the pantry and the servants' quarters.

Here they paused a moment, looking quietly into each other's eyes. Their next step was important. The pace of a party is the pace of its slowest member, and Dudley being a slow mover, they had taken ten minutes to reach this point. Though Gilderoy could have covered the ground in a few seconds, he had regulated his speed tactfully, keeping behind his waddling friend. Time was passing. Another thump and bang in the distance warned them that a servant had now decided, after all, to get up. There was a sound of sulky footsteps on the kitchen stairs. The moment

for decisive action had arrived. For some time, therefore, the pair stood motionless, staring into each other's eyes.

"Let's get along," signified Gilderoy at length, yet making no move himself. He turned his eyes in the direction of a narrow skylight overhead.

Dudley, of course, had noticed it long ago. He also noticed the admiration still in the cat's expression. He would continue to lead. Using a chair, a hanging cord, a convenient shelf with precious china on it, and an iron bar, he fluttered up awkwardly, scrambled through the skylight, crossed some slates, descended an ivy-clad wall, and proceeded to march proudly, if clumsily, down the gravel drive in the direction of the lodge gates. The warm early sunshine pleased him. It was good to be out. He moved at his very best pace.

"You waddle," remarked Gilderoy, his tail in the air like a ramrod. He made himself very big and protective. "I'm behind you, remember."

"My wings," replied Dudley some twenty yards later, "are clipped and I possess two feet!" He stalked on. "I only need —two," he added presently. There was a touch of grandeur in his attitude. After another twenty yards he disposed of this idea of protection too. "I see out of the back of my head," he reminded the cat. But he did not say it sharply. *Noblesse*, he remembered, always obliged. To put the other in his place, and pay himself a neat compliment at the same time, was quite sufficient. "And it's a nice warm morning," he concluded, saying the words aloud in his soft gabbling little voice.

He used, that is, the method these two friends adopted to avoid unpleasantness. At the first sign of a disturbance it was their habit to change the subject. A squabble between them was thus invariably nipped in the bud. They never quarrelled. The cat, his eye on a thrush a hundred yards ahead, agreed about the nice, warm morning, and stalked along stiffly with a restraint that was evidently a self-imposed effort. He would have liked to dart and rush. The next moment, indeed, he did so. Springing furiously at a pine tree, he suddenly flew ten feet up the trunk, claws spread, tail whirling, teeth bared, and looking fiercely over his back with flattened ears as though the dogs were at his heels. For two minutes he clung to the tree in this spread-eagled fashion, then dropped to the ground again as though nothing had happened, and continued his stiff, slow walk beside his friend. Neither thrush nor parrot had shown a sign of being disturbed by this impressive performance. Gilderoy's active body needed the relief of a romp, no more than that.

"Ah!" said Dudley, when his friend caught him up again. He had used the interval to advance.

"We shall get there some time, even at this pace," said Gilderoy.

"Where?" enquired his companion.

"Where we're going to," came the rather tart reply. And, having now reached the lodge gates, they again paused and gazed into each other's eyes. The white country lane stretched in both directions as usual. At this early hour it was

still deserted. Dudley, standing at right angles to it, examined it, owing to the position of his eyes, in both directions simultaneously. His companion, wholly indifferent, fell to washing an inaccessible region of his back. The windows of the Lodge were shut tight. No one was astir. And the bird shrank back a trifle towards the covering protection of the hedge where the wild roses shone. There came over him the fact that he had escaped from his safe, comfortable home.

He realized it, realized that he was no longer in captivity. There were no bars about him, no little dish of seed or tin or water, the swinging bit of soft wood his beak plucked to pieces and played with was missing, so was the clean coarse gritty sand his health demanded. There was no perch along which he could retire. He took another step backwards towards the comfort of the hedge. Gilderoy, for the moment, had unaccountably disappeared. The ancient bird felt suddenly lonely. A sense of insecurity stole over him.

Gilderoy, of course, would come back in a moment, he knew; he was merely scampering after a bird or mouse, but in the meantime the sense of insecurity was undeniable. Yet this, apparently, was all he felt. He experienced no regret, no compunction, his unceremonious exit from home caused him no pang. His world, the

cat's world too, did not include regret; escape was natural to it. He thought of Molly a moment —he could go back to her when he wished; he thought of others, of Colonel Sir Arthur, for instance, of the Governess—he need never see *them* again. The one called him a "damned squawker," the other was always saying "*Tais-toi, Tais-toi, donc!*" Beyond these cursory reflections, however, his mind did not trouble with the past. Like all animals, he concentrated on the present, and the present just now not being all it might be, he cast about for something to alleviate a certain strain he felt. Spontaneously, he chose a whistle—the only tune he knew. The opening bars of *Lead Kindly Light* ran down the hedge and past the shining roses. It was a very low soft whistle, hardly audible a yard beyond his beak.

In the middle of which Gilderoy, with a scattering leap, was beside him again, appearing from nowhere, and licking his chops as though he had never been away.

"Come on, you!" said the ginger cat impatiently. The bird noticed at once that his bolshevik face wore a slightly different expression. The cheeks bulged a trifle more. There was something inside him that was not there when he disappeared a moment before.

"Ready," returned the parrot, relieved to have him back, while thinking at the same time what a dreadful thing he was to look at. He began to move slowly away from the hedge behind him, but the rough ground was not easy for his little feet and the claws kept catching. His advance

was circular rather, remembering that Gilderoy watched him.

"Where to?" he enquired casually, his head wrenched sideways at an extraordinary angle.

"London for *me*," replied Gilderoy with decision.

His friend took the Vicar's voice. "Quaite," he agreed, and marched on ahead in the thick white dust of the deserted lane. He was Leader still. He moved at a proud pace that rather endangered his balance, but could not affect his courage.

Gilderoy watched him. "D'you know where you're going?" he flashed with his whiskers, not stirring an inch himself.

"Er—not exactly," the bird replied, indifferently. He did not stop. "London anyhow," he added.

"Wrong direction, then," Gilderoy informed him bluntly, as he stood there sniffing the air with little twitching jerks.

Dudley turned in a slow circle till he faced the other way. "For where?" he asked again gently.

"Train," said the cat, watching him with steady eyes. "You walk like nothing on earth," he commented, as his friend, turning another half-circle, drew alongside with his odd waddling gait.

"Yes, train," agreed the bird. He made a gesture that signified he was of the air and walking was a concession merely. And the pair stood motionless in the sunshine, as though nothing in the world mattered but being exactly where they

were, and as though no adventure had begun at all.

Each creature, none the less, was active mentally. Their minds were extremely busy. Since they stopped all outward signs of communication, however, each kept his reflections to himself. It was a moment of privacy.

"It's going to be difficult, rather," the red cat was thinking, "this trip of ours. He's such a slow mover. He's fussy too, and his shape is a bit conspicuous." He purred gently, aware that his own appearance was perfection. His heart warmed towards his pal at the same time. "And his sex," thought ran on, "I'd like to know that!" A protective sense, never experienced towards humans, stirred strongly in him. He put all his very best into his friendship with the parrot. His patched eye glanced towards him admiringly. "Has useful ears, anyhow," he concluded. "Male or female isn't so important perhaps—in a bird." He gave a tiny sneeze.

Dudley, too, for his part was thinking deeply, and his thoughts were concerned, chiefly, with the appearance of this common cat, his companion in adventure. Whilst himself an aristocrat in every meaning of the word, he was not a snob, thank goodness. There was something in cats that he really respected and admired, something mysterious and queer and strange, but this particular cat.... He searched for terms that should be accurate yet fair, and did not find them. Something let out of a bag hardly met the case. Comparing Gilderoy's shabby looks with his own

immaculate appearance, he deplored both his manners and his coat. At the same time he admired what he honestly could—speed, silence, sight. " Hideous," he concluded, " perhaps sometimes dangerous, but I love him."

Each, having thus finished his own private reflections, respectively, turned round and began to communicate openly with the other.

There was an immense satisfaction, evidently, that they had left the Day Nursery, for both had grievances, it seemed. Dudley was sick to death of being called " Pretty Polly " in an affected voice, of being assured a hundred times a day by all sorts of people that he wanted a cracker, a thing he never did want. Gilderoy, for his part, was weary of being lifted up in sections with all his feet hanging in empty space. And both were tired of hearing the children talk about an owl and a pussycat who went to sea in a pea-green boat. Tired to death they were of this nonsense. It was time, they felt, that mention was made of a parrot and a cat. For parrots and cats were notoriously enemies, whereas this pair was friendly. But no one spoke of it. And to be taken for granted like this month after month was more than they could have put up with a moment longer.

The pair of rascals, thus, had a satisfaction in escaping, and they now communicated this happy mood to one another. They did so, looking about them over the sunny green fields starred with buttercups and daisies.

Now, communication between them, be it explained once for all, was so rapid, comprehen-

sive, adequate, that it easily surpassed the capacity of ordinary language. Human beings, having gradually invented a series of not always musical sounds to convey what they know possess none, of course, to convey what they do *not* know. For the experiences of non-humans they have no words. Hence, purring and a parrot's gurglings, since they refer to another order of experience, remain, for humans, indecipherable. Into these and other gorgeous sounds, however, these creatures project their own wisdom, their inanities, their thoughts and feelings, with consummate ease. They understand one another. Gesture and attitude, the shaking of a feather, the twitching of tail or whiskers, the cock of head or angle of neck, the flick of an ear, even the movement of agile claws and toes —these largely took the place of clumsy words.

Thus, while Dudley and Gilderoy now gazed into one another's eyes, apparently uncommunicative, they were actually exchanging ideas of this high, but above all different, order. These ideas, none the less, must here be interpreted in terms humanity understands:

" Let's get on," remarked Gilderoy.

Dudley bowed his head in agreement. " Now, what do you know about trains, for instance? " he enquired sweetly.

" Enough," admitted the cat, " to take one."

" Which? " practical Dudley wanted to know.

" The first we see," was the reply. " They all reach London, I've heard, sooner or later." He glanced down the lane to the left.

The parrot, too, glanced down the lane, but to

the right. He was not going to look foolish by taking the wrong direction a second time.

"Then please carry me," he signified. "The dust bothers my toes rather."

"Hop on!" agreed the other, lowering his scrawny back to an easy position. "And don't scratch or tickle."

Dudley, without further ado, fluttered on to the red back, raising a cloud of dust as he did so, and the pair then raced down the long hill towards the station. The cat went at a good speed, though out of consideration for his friend's disabilities, hardly his top speed, and the bird held on and kept his balance without undue loss of dignity. The wind blew out his tail feathers grandly.

"It's a pity you can't see me," proclaimed the tail feathers. "I look well behind, in front, and sideways too!"

Instead of answering, however, Gilderoy increased his speed, till at last the parrot felt obliged to comment audibly on this increase.

He screamed.

The cat at once erected his tail into its best ramrod position, so that it stood upright like a pole, and Dudley wriggled awkwardly backwards till he clasped it with his beak and one claw.

"You're pricking!" spat Gilderoy, and stopped so abruptly that his passenger lost something of his dignity, though not quite all of his amazing balance.

"And what's this mean?" he asked, looking down his beak sideways but still clinging to the ramrod tail in case of a start as sudden as the stop.

" I've something to say to you," signalled the cat, not a bit out of breath, " and it is this! "

Dudley cocked his head to listen.

" If any one chases us," the quadruped went on, " we go in different directions, remember." He lifted one paw and shook it with extreme rapidity in the air. " One of us," he added, " may then escape."

There was no need for a bird of Dudley's acumen to ponder this, and it vexed him a little when his intelligence was underrated. His contemptuous stare conveyed his feeling plainly:

" You're as obvious as a dog. Get along now to the train."

The stare was withering. With less admirable beings a sharp reply must have precipitated a quarrel; but there was no sharp reply. The cat realized, for one thing, perhaps, that his back lay open to that iron beak.

" I see plenty of young birds about," he mentioned instead, changing the conversation and peeping towards the hedge.

And having thus dropped a suggestive yet delicate hint near home and at the same time averted an unpleasantness that threatened, he raced away again at such a speed that five minutes later they reached the little station where a train, they saw, was standing at the platform. It was, obviously, rather an early train.

CHAPTER III

Grey parrots which are able to retain a varied collection of words and sentences are the most valuable, for, notwithstanding their attainments, they will constantly acquire other accomplishments.—W. T. Greene.

IT was, as Dudley had observed, a lovely morning. Threads of gossamer glistened in the air. There was a smell of growing grass and flowers. Swallows darted, butterflies stood on their heads as they tumbled downwards, worms oozed and gurgled in the dew-soaked earth of the surrounding fields with sheer joy of living. There was a sparkle. There was a hush of coming glory.

The two ragamuffins halted by the coal-yard, the station facing them a dozen yards away. They felt in no hurry. Life lay before them, wide open, unrestricted. The rapture of Liberty filled their little hearts. Dudley stood on one foot, the other claw clasping his formidable beak. Gilderoy his back to the building, sniffed the blades of grass with extreme delicacy. Neither betrayed any interest in the matter immediately on hand, though both realized, of course, that very shortly they would have to deal with human beings. This apparent indifference was partly clever mental camouflage, native to their world, and partly funk.

Dudley, at any rate, spent the considerable interval that now intervened in what may be described as pulling himself together. His kindly attitude towards human beings has already been

touched upon, but this tolerance included another aspect that may here be mentioned: the complacent superiority of the human race could sometimes exasperate him. When men came up against qualities in the animal world that excelled their own, they dismissed it as "instinct" and wrote books about it. Merely because they did things that animals could not do, they considered themselves superior. What they forgot, in Dudley's view, was that in another way, animals easily surpassed them—for instance in *not* doing what they did. Thus animals were never deliberate scoundrels, liars, culpable idiots, immoral or obscene. They were also comely in nakedness and unashamed.

Something of this now passed across the parrot's mind as he held his beak and waited.

"Do you think this train will start to-day?" he enquired presently.

"We'll get in and see," came from the cat, whose eyes were following the swallows' flight above him. He had noticed milk cans on the platforms. He had been in trains before. He flattered himself that he knew his way about on the Big Lines. There was some business about tickets, for instance, he remembered vaguely. Money, too, glittering metal circles he sometimes played with, came into it as well. "There's the tickets," he managed, therefore, to inform his friend.

For another ten minutes or so neither of them made a move of any sort, after which the parrot suddenly lowered his claw and drew himself up proudly. Choosing from his immense repertoire

of voices the one Colonel Sir Arthur used when moving his family to the seaside, he spoke aloud:

"Leave it to me," he announced, and stalked forward across the yard with head erect, while Gilderoy followed meekly enough, without a trace of expression on his peeping face. He moved in zigzags. They might have been total strangers. He betrayed no interest in anything about him.

They crossed the yard and approached the ticket office.

The station was empty at the moment, for at this early hour the inhabitants of Muddlepuddle were not eager to go to London. On the platform outside, however, there was a considerable bustle, with a din of milk cans being rolled about. This Country Station Porters' Game was in full swing, as Gilderoy, still admiring Dudley's back view, followed his friend slowly through the door into the Waiting Room-cum-Booking Office. Knowing himself safely inconspicuous he now watched his dressy companion waddle across like an old woman with sore feet, climb upon a packing-case that stood handy, and present himself boldly at the open window where tickets were obtained. He really looked a picture, the cat decided, as he balanced on the ledge with his head cocked sideways and one foot tucked up among his tummy feathers. It was a frontal attack the feline felt obliged to admire. He himself now lay along the wooden bench by the wall, pretending cleverly he was the Station Cat. No one would have noticed him.

"Two First Singles," announced the parrot, using his old-man's voice, which was low and rather gruff.

He stood waiting as calmly as though he had done it every morning for years and years. The secret of remaining undiscovered, he knew, was to appear quite ordinary.

The Ticket Man was standing inside, his back to the window. A pencil was stuck behind his ear. He wore spectacles, a dirty green cap, and side whiskers that resembled lichen on old wrinkled granite.

"Where to?" he asked, without interest. He did not even turn round, much less look up.

"Where the train goes," said Dudley, sharply.

"Tha's London," said the man.

"Tha's good," said Dudley.

The man drew out the tickets with a mechanical fumbling motion, stamped them, held them a moment very close to his eyes to examine what he had stamped, handed them carelessly across the little counter, and then, while waiting for the money, raised his head for the first time and saw—a large, grey, red-tailed parrot on a level with his face, its beak hanging sideways, and one brilliant eye gazing intently into his.

" Holy smoke! " he cried, opening his eyes and mouth. " What is it? "

He gasped, he paled, he took a step backwards. The pencil dropped from behind his ear, the cap fell off his head, the spectacles slipped down his nose. He stumbled over a chair behind him and collapsed in a heap against the iron stove.

" Thank you," said Dudley, using Mother's patient voice the children heard when they asked for one more story. He turned away, leaving the tickets where they were. " Now, cat! " he signalled with a shrill, peremptory gesture. " Hop for it! Quick! "

Gilderoy, though resenting being spoken to like that in public, was ready in a flash, so that the bird dropped straight down on to his back below the window-ledge, and a second later the pair were racing along the platform among the rolling milk-cans, looking for an empty carriage.

" I said Leave it to Me, didn't I? " proclaimed the bird's attitude proudly, as they scampered along.

" Use my proper name before people, please," said Gilderoy stiffly.

" Sorry," said Dudley promptly in a child's voice.

The cat accepted the apology with a twitch of the tail as, spying an open door, he scuttled up the steps with a sudden leap that nearly knocked the parrot off his back. It was a First, but also it was a Smoker. " Ugh! " exclaimed the bird, sniffing contemptuously, as he recovered his balance and stepped down. He gave one rapid look round him.

"The rack, I think, for me!" he decided, and instantly scrambled up into the netting, snuggling into the dark corner so that he was very difficult to see. The cat disappeared in a flash under the heavily-cushoined seats, where not even the tip of his tail was visible.

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo! *Nil nisi prius!*" whispered the parrot to himself, too low to be audible, and using language acquired long before he had come to stay at the Manor House. He then relapsed into complete silence.

They were only just in time, as the roar of voices and rush of hurrying feet plainly told them, for the platform was now alive with people all hunting vociferously for a Grey Parrot and a Ginger Cat. Three workmen, a couple of porters, the driver of the milk-waggon, a farmer, an old woman, and the ticket man tore frantically up and down, crying at the top of their voices: "Hi! A grey parrot with a red tail! And a ginger cat! Which way did they go? Where are they? Who's seen 'em? Catch 'em! Catch 'em! . . ."

The hunt roared past the door of the carriage like a storm, and such a hullabaloo was never heard before since the Station of Muddlepuddle was first built in 1861.

"On the roof, of course!" shouted the farmer. "That's where they are!"

"In the Guard's van," yelled the driver of the cart.

"Get along with yer!" cried the porter. "They're ridin' on the haxles, I tell yer!"

"Rubbidge!" screamed the old woman. "It's

near the engine biler you'll find them. Why, I've kept parrots meself. It's the 'ot plaices they likes best."

"If I catch 'em," bawled the ticket man, tearing about without cap or spectacles, "I'll twist their bloomin' tails off, not 'arf I won't. The lip that bird gave me!"

"No, you wouldn't, Joe," laughed the Guard, a big man with a black beard and a voice of thunder. "You'd just take 'em 'ome and love 'em. That's wot *you'd* do."

The pack fell to arguing among themselves as they ran up and down, and though most of them looked into the First Class Smoker where the criminals were hiding, no one discovered them. No one, luckily, produced a dog.

"Time to get my train away now," suddenly bawled the Guard's deep bass. "I'm a minute late already. Can't wait for live stock! Stand away now! Ready!" He banged the door of the empty carriage, put the whistle to his lips, and blew a short, shrill blast. The train pulled slowly out of the station, leaving the yelling group of people still searching among the empty milk cans.

The rumble and murmur of the train was soothing, the rhythm pleasant. Dudley liked the motion with its gentle shaking to and fro. His exquisite little body yielded itself with satisfaction to the swing and bumping of the sleepers. He felt happy. "Polly . . . hell . . . *hic jacet* . . . cracker-cracker," he expressed his pleasure in his very lowest gabbling tone. No one, not even Gilderoy, could have heard him. It was one of his best

tricks, self-protective, defensive, only rarely used—to mutter extremely interesting things so low that no one could hear them.

Gilderoy, invisible under the seat, made no reply. In the first place, he had not heard; in the second, he was fast asleep, rolled up in a tight red ball.

CHAPTER IV

The variety is infinite . . . each individual has its own idiosyncrasy.—W. T. GREENE.

It is very *difficult to tell the sex of Grey Parrots, for although the males usually declare themselves by their greater capacity for talking and whistling, some females approach them pretty nearly in this respect.*

W. T. GREENE.

ONLY the surface of the two Adventurers has been touched upon so far; a glimpse into their interiors, below this surface, might be of interest. Their inner world, not being our human world, is difficult to enter. Yet it is well worth the effort, to force an entrance, as it were. Human beings, in their vanity and egoism, invariably interpret what is beyond them in terms of themselves. It is inevitable, of course, since they have no other terms to use. Their own experience necessarily limits their highest flights. Their supreme deity thus, becomes anthropomorphic, the lesser deities become personifications of the forces of nature, heaven a hunting ground and hell a blazing kitchen fire. Into animals, similarly, they read their own faiths, fetiches, and foibles.

It is a disastrous method, suggesting that the childhood of the world is still at the nursery stage. Gross misunderstanding results, and the truth is missed. This apology, however, is merely what Dudley might have called *en passant* in the Governess's nasal voice. It is an abject apology—

to these two Adventurers. Their psychology, their means of communicating, their motives, actions, hopes and fears in all that follows must be rendered in gross human terms—because we know no other way.

Moreover, if Dudley bulks larger than his incomparable comrade, it is, for a sufficiently obvious reason: namely, that a parrot stands much closer to human categories than a cat does. The cat is, in fact, not quite of this world; hunger and sex it may share with the rest of the Animal World, but nothing more. Its feelings, motives, methods, tastes, ambitions, hopes are of a different and inscrutable order. They are oblique and slanting. It has, for reasons of its own no doubt, entered this world, it has elected, so far at any rate, to remain. It is, however, *different* from all other living creatures on the planet. To understand, far more to describe, the soul of a cat, is beyond any faculty we possess. It remains, therefore, indescribable. A modern critic has rightly warned a writer that to use this adjective is to admit he does not "know his job." It must be used here, none the less, and precisely in this way.

Dudley, with his sense of proportion, and his linguistic knowledge acquired when he was younger, would put a clear "stet" in the margin against the erasing line. "Indescribable" would stand. He would also, similarly taught, now add to this tedious explanation: *verb. sap.*

Left, meanwhile, temporarily to his own devices, he fell to thinking things over in his own quiet way, an occupation at which few could

equal, and none, excel him. It was his habit sometimes to do this for hours at a stretch, making no sound, nor hardly any movement, an adorable statue upon an insignificant perch. Superbly self-contained, he held his balance, mentally and physically, no matter what the uproar of the outer world might be.

With one fierce claw he would clutch his savage beak; occasionally, the small soft feathers on his neck would slightly stir; his toes, sole contact with what men call reality, would quietly open and shut; while his all-seeing—some thought, his wicked—eyes roved to and fro, taking in everything, yet betraying no ghost of an expression. His opinion of what he saw, none knew.

It was to Molly he owed a nice explanation of these long silences. She never would admit that they were due to mere emptiness of mind. They were constructive, even creative silences. "He's thinking his tremendous thoughts! He's working!" she informed everyone, himself included. "Dudley's got his great Work. He mustn't be disturbed . . .!"

So now, while the train rumbled comfortably on its way, the rumble and the rhythm soothed him, and he began talking to himself in his gentlest voice. He fell to gabbling. It was the voice, in all his vast repertoire, most difficut to follow and understand, He used it very rarely—when the gramaphone was playing, when the children had not teased and bored him into screaming, when no visitors stood by his cage, saying foolish things about crackers in affected voices. It was, in a word, his Happy Voice.

It had first sung its golden song, no doubt, when the world was young, the warm air scented with myriad gorgeous flowers, when nuts basked by the thousand in the sunshine, and no ridiculous bipeds swarmed and strutted everywhere as if all creation belonged to them. It was sung, above all, when he had known the rapture of sweet companionship.

"I am now," he crooned softly to himself, "a lonely old bird. Lonely, yes, and old. How lonely, no one knows; how old, *I* know, but never tell. When I was born, and where, remain my secret. I have neither nest nor family, and, indeed, I need them not. I have no young to feed. . . ."

The low voice wavered a little. He shook his head, ruffling gently the smallest feathers on his lower neck.

"By the hour together I sit and dream, and my dreams are of gold and purple. . . . What I dream is my own affair, nor could I ever speak of it to others—others, that is, who know so little about me that they cannot even decide which sex I honour with my patronage. I am referred to as a "He"; it is a courtesy title. These I leave in their profound and abject ignorance. I have my million dreams. I have my Work. What that Work is even Molly does not know. But I——" His voice dropped suddenly. There was an unaccountable instant of hesitation. "*I—know*," he resumed. His tail feathers shivered slightly. He added in an almost inaudible whisper: "I have never seen—an egg."

There was a pause during which the voice sank

away to nothing. He seemed in the grip of some mysterious emotion. He gave no clear sign, however, as to its nature; there was no betrayal.

" Some claim, I hear, that I derive from Borneo; while others, equally positive, prefer Brazil. Both lots I classify according to my unalterable code. Similarly, I classify those who swear ' on God's truth ' that I was brought here by a sailor from the ' bloody Amazon,' and those, again, who think it more distinguished to mention the Captain of a South African Liner as my sponsor. East Africa also I have heard quoted, West Africa, the disreputable Congo too. I listen and say nothing. They are welcome to the East Indies, as to Jamaica and Mauritius, who have never heard of the Cameroons, the Gaboon and the flats of the Niger estuary."

He chuckled.

" How, then, can they know of ' Pico de Papagio,' the Peak of the Parrot on Princes Island in the Gulf of Guinea, called "—a deep sigh escaped him —" ' the Paradise of Grey Parrots '? How can they know that this mountain of 12,000 feet is covered with magnificent forests? That the trees, of huge size and height, support lianos and other climbing plants which hang about them in rich and luxuriant folds? That the density of this forest is so great that is is only with the utmost difficulty that a man can force a passage through it .... but to the parrots, the Grey Parrots, who come up there every night to roost, it presents no obstacle, but gives them, under the shelter of thick foliage, a secure and pleasant resting place?

" They cannot know. And if I use Greene's words, I do so merely because he tells the truth, and *nuda est veritas et hic haec hoc. . . .*" The Latin, uttered as a single word, was well nigh indecipherable. The discovery that it *was* Latin, was due to the Vicar, an Oxford man.

The gabbling, soft and musical, continued without an instant's interruption, keeping time with the rhythm of the train.

" I listen . . . yes, I listen," thought dwelling a moment on his supreme gift, " by the hour, I sit and listen. In the daytime I balance on my tiny perch and listen; at night, when they cover my cage with a stinking shawl, I still sit and listen . . . and what I cannot hear is merely—not worth hearing. . . ."

He entered a state of inspired and delicious bliss, a state of ecstasy, a form of consciousness humans cannot know.

" I hear," he went on divinely, " the earth pass rolling round the sun. I hear the flowers grow. I hear the dawn slant up and kiss the fields. I hear the starlight's whisper when it meets the dew, and the clanging of the full-moon's chord against the pines. Ah, me! I hear the faint thunder of the distant galaxies, sunk in their frightful space. . . ."

His voice changed suddenly. A slight difference in the rhythm of the train brought him down to earth perhaps. The bumping, it seemed, had become less regular.

" Once," he went on, " I told them something," the voice shaken by the jolting of the wheels. " I warned them when the enemy aeroplanes were

coming across the sea to hit them. I had heard them start. I heard——"

The train stopped with a violent jerk, almost shaking the rapt bird from his dreary luggage-rack. He retained both balance and composure, however. One pointed toe, clutching the webbing, rubbed against its neighbour. He indulged in a tiny cough, clearing his throat, although no word was audible. He glanced down. Gilderoy's sharp muzzle was visible below the edge of the seat. The puffed red cheeks and wireless whiskers peeped up enquiringly. The cat was excited.

"A station," signalled Gilderoy. "The train's stopping. Somebody may get in."

To a bird of Dudley's quality, the warning was superfluous, and his one eye, glancing sideways, conveyed the fact unmistakeably. Gilderoy pipped out of sight again.

"Leave it to me," was the answer he took with him. And silence descended again upon the empty carriage, the cat being literally out of sight, and the parrot so well camouflaged that few human eyes could have detected him.

The train, after shaking itself backwards and forwards with a series of sharp jerks, now finally stopped and a moment later somebody did get in —a stout, elderly gentleman, wearing a top hat, a black tail-coat, and shiny boots. He was instantly taken in from top to toe by two pair of keenly observant eyes. He carried a polished black bag, a neatly folded umbrella, and, warm though the day was, a plaid rug across his arm. There was an air of importance about him, it was noticed. He

thought himself important. To somebody, somewhere, he perhaps was important. To the black-bearded guard, at any rate, for this person now touched his cap, helped him in, said it was a fine morning, expressed a hope that he felt as well as he looked, then, pocketing a silver coin, as though it was the last thing in the world he expected, retired with a bow.

He raised his green flag and swept it about his head several times with an air of fierceness, blew his whistle as though *his* train could never possibly be late, smiled respectfully at the old gentleman, who did not return the smile because he had not noticed it, and finally swung himself like an athlete into the van as the train moved out, his coat-tails flying. He, too, obviously felt more important since he had become responsible for the safety of the new passenger.

With their particular gifts, respectively, the two creatures had noticed that the sight of this new passenger was not good, and that he was also a little deaf.

"You can come out if you want to," indicated a faint gurgle from the rack.

"I don't," replied the tip of a tail that jerked once beyond the seat.

They lapsed into silence. The train gathered speed.

The elderly gentleman, meanwhile, produced a pair of magnifying spectacles with horn rims, adjusted them carefully on his nose, crossed his legs, opened an enormous newspaper, and settled down comfortably behind it to read his favourite

financial column. The plaid rug lay spread across his lap.

Dudley, observing him closely from his dim corner, knew what was coming; his sense of anticipation rarely failed; a faint shiver of disgust ran over his delicate nerves. The intruder, indeed, now produced a cigar from a heavily-engraved case, bit its end off, stuck it between his lips, and proceeded to light it by striking a match on a small gold matchbox. The first puff blew out, filling the carriage with a cloud of acrid smoke. He then closed the one open window, and disappeared again behind his enormous newspaper.

The situation became, in Dudley's view, intolerable. Since it was due to his superiority always to set the tone in dealing with a *contretemps* he gave no thought to his companion beneath the seat. He himself disliked smoke; that was enough. "Leave it to me," had been his dictum. What he had said he had said. The two friends, each busy with racial preoccupations, motionless, self-contained, concentrated, held their posts quietly, at any rate. Silence reigned, broken only by the crackle of the newspaper and the rumble of the train. The atmosphere slowly thickened. The smoker remained ignorant that he was not alone, for Dudley might have been part of the carriage decoration scheme; nor could the sharpest eye have disentangled Gilderoy from the general mess beneath the seat.

It was some minutes before anything happened, but in due course, as the train began to slow up for the next station, the grand bird started to preen

himself. There were few occasions, if any, he flattered himself, to which he was not equal. An elderly gentleman smoking a cigar lay easily within his competence. He was in no hurry. He waited the right moment to take action.

The train stopped. It was a junction. There was a throng and bustle on the platform. New passengers carrying market produce in unwieldy baskets thumped to and fro. The moment for action had arrived. The bird seized it with admirable decision. Lifting his fine head a fraction of an inch and filling his lungs, he produced his gruffest, most commanding voice. It was a First Mate voice, remembered from his steamer-days of long ago:

"All change 'ere!" he bawled. "Like 'ell you do!" The shout of urgent and peremptory hurry was repeated twice. "All chinge! All chinge!"

The old gentleman sprang from his seat, dropped his newspaper, fumbled his glasses, snatched wildly at this bag and umbrella, choked thickly as he swallowed a mouthful of cigar smoke, opened the carriage door and scrambled out so fast that he nearly fell in his excitement.

"Tike yer seats! Tike yer seats, please!" bawled a loud voice from nowhere.

He knew not whence it came. No one seemed in sight to help him, for everybody rushed to and fro on business of their own. He looked to the right, he looked to the left; he shouted "Guard!" he shouted "Porter!" He informed the bustling platform that he had never changed at this station

in his life before, that he had taken this particular train for years, but the platform was not interested in this statement. He found no one to advise him. There was not a second to spare. He plunged about like a frightened rabbit, tripped over his rug, dropped his cigar, stumbled over the umbrella which became entangled with his short little legs, and finally bundled into another carriage just as the train started and the Guard ran up to tell him there was no need to have changed at all.

The incident was closed. In the animal world there is no idle reviewing of what is past. The present being all important, why waste time and energy dwelling upon what has gone or estimating what is yet to come? No word of praise, therefore, came from Gilderoy's lips, no demand for a recognition of his success from the parrot's beak. An exchange of thought and comment took place, yet not of the kind that humans would probably have used in similar circumstances. Gilderoy leaped into the cushioned corner just vacated, Dudley moved further along the luggage rack where he would be less cramped.

"You're not even going where you're looking," conveyed Gilderoy's stare, before curling round to sleep. He was watching his friend intently. He evidently would not settle till the bird had settled.

Dudley, busy changing his place, made no reply at first. Ignoring the stare, which was something between sneer and insult, he minded his own immediate business, and in any case it was his habit to accept even the rudest words as praise.

He *was*, moreover, achieving a result at the moment no other living creature could have managed. The cat's comment was justified. He was moving along the webbing, each foot pointing in a different direction, his head looking down his own back, and his body, apparently, advancing the other way—a spectacle certainly calculated to upset an ordinary mind. Gradually settling himself comfortably in the very centre of the rack, he rolled one eye solemnly down upon Gilderoy and answered the challenge of the staring red face. He used the voice that said interesting things too softly to be heard. He fell into Latin.

"*Vice versa requiescat in pieces*," came the gabbling murmur, continuing until the cat became a red ball of sleep. The stream of happy sound poured on and on without interruption for a long time, words such as *viva voce* and *ad astra* from time to time emerging clearly, the rest indistinguishable.

The cat lay sound asleep, Dudley felt happy and secure in his rack. No one could hear him, but he enjoyed the music of his own low gurgle. He drew upon various sources. At one time, before Colonel Sir Arthur objected, he had occupied the Library of the Manor House, and Molly had explained that his knowledge of literature was thus acquired. The Latin, however, derived from a still earlier period, how long ago none knew. Known vulgarly as "Pol" then, he had lived with a scholar, according to the child. Actually, it seems, his host was a dipsomaniac who used Latin tags in general conversation and inaccurately.

Hence the bird's smattering of a dead language.

"*Per contra nolens volens*, 'ave a good time. Can't come in I'm dressing," he concluded at length in a loud clear tone, and closing his eyes dropped off, like Gilderoy, into a pleasant nap.

CHATER V

We cannot, without becoming cats, perfectly understand the cat mind.—St. George Mivart.

THE train, meanwhile, rumbled comfortably on past numerous little wayside stations, bearing its couple of unusual First Class Travellers to London. Even in sleep the pair were eloquent: "The houses of the great for *me*!" was unmistakeably conveyed by Dudley's attitude of aristocratic grace, while from the angle of the slightly cocked head came the unselfish thought for his companion: "And for you—whom would *you* like to meet?" The set of the tail indicated that he had the *entrée* to all possible sets. It held the patronising superiority of which the supreme egoist remains ever unaware.

A red whisker on the cushions below signalled blandly, in cat sleep: "My own pals, of course. You know quite well."

For they were old friends now, this parrot and this cat; not otherwise could they have started on so great an enterprise with so few preliminaries. For six months already the intimacy had lasted. It had not begun with love at first sight, however.

The cat was originally a stray cat only. It had just "blown in" one day from nowhere, and Sir Arthur's Lady, almost hysterically partial to all animals, had at once adopted it. Whence it came to the Manor House, no one knew, but from a long way evidently, since there were no "nice houses,"

within miles, and the creature was most unkempt. After being washed and scrubbed with disinfectant, adorned, too, with a bit of blue ribbon round its scraggy neck, its appearance altered, some thought improved.

Liking its new home, it settled down.

"It's a sort of laundry cat," was the opinion of the youngest little girl, though no one knew exactly what that meant.

The mother agreed vaguely: "So we'd better call her Mrs. Tompkyns," the connection between name and place left unexplained. "With a P. of course," she added, being attached to details. And the name, despite its unwieldiness, had stuck.

For a week, at least, it stuck. And then Father, a large and clumsy man, not having yet noticed the new beast in the family circle—there were always new beasts, it seemed to him!—came in from golf one evening and tripped over it on the mat.

"Holy Gilderoy!" he roared, a favourite expletive. "What's this new bit of ginger horror?" From which moment the cat was christened afresh.

"Well, you see," observed Mother to the children, "it *is* a male anyhow. So perhaps Gilderoy is better—on the whole."

The ginger horror had been introduced to the parrot as "Mrs. Tompkyns," with hesitation, but the caution proved unnecessary. The bird ignored it. He took not the slightest notice of the creature. The name never once passed his beak. "Tompkyns" was evidently anathema. This new name,

however, he picked up at once. Evidently, he liked it. It had a sonorous sound that he could roll round his mouth. He did roll it round his mouth, and with satisfaction. He even made its syllables sound musical, lifting the "roy" into a sort of semi-chant upon a slightly higher key.

"Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*!" he would repeat over and over to himself in his lonely hours with profound enjoyment. The Day Nursery echoed to his gilder-*roy*-ing morning, noon, and night, bringing again, a new expression to his notice: Sir Arthur's "damned squawker."

In the confusion that followed Dudley never once lost his head. Nurse, mother, governess, and children mixed the names forgetfully, so that "Mrs. Tompkyns-Gilderoy" and "Mr. Gilderoy-Tompkyns" were often heard. Even Molly herself made mistakes, and Dudley alone remained accurate and consistent. He liked "Gilderoy" and stuck to it.

To all this fuss and fury, the cat himself remained supremely indifferent. Being sheltered and well fed, names were not important. At first he kept his distance from the handsome cage. Yet, occasionally, when the parrot was at his gilder-*roy*-ing, he would glance up and purr, as though, generally speaking, he knew what was going on. Dudley, at any rate, after this second christening, knew quite well what was going on; he was now intensely aware of the new creature in the family circle.

With his head twisted sideways, one claw fondling the great dangerous beak, he would gaze down

upon the red cat by the hour. There was, perhaps, no particular sign of feeling, still less of intelligence, in his gaze. He merely gazed, betraying no hint of what was passing through his mind. Yet he presently allowed the new-comer close to his cage without a single gesture of annoyance or alarm. Its proximity evidently pleased him, and Gilderoy, aware of this, begun to make tentative advances. The bird then suddenly took to performing his dainty little Two Step on the perch, sure proof of finding life at the moment good; next, he began opening and shutting his claws, blinking his eyes rapidly, gurgling even, when it sat near enough tor contact through the bars—a proof, with him, of ecstasy.

Till, at last, one day, with a burst of inspired music, he produced his most penetrating shriek: "Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*!" and the new friendship became solidly established.

From this moment, indeed, dated the intimate and affectionate relationship between the two rascals. They understood one another, as has been seen. They avoided misunderstandings, as has likewise been seen, by the device of changing the subject the instant danger threatened. If Gilderoy's aloof indifference helped towards this end, so also did Dudley's habit of accepting even the grossest insults as a form of admiration. While

Gilderoy, again, admired his friend's appearance as much as he admired his own, Dudley was under no illusions about the cat's get-up—distinctive perhaps, yet without noticeable beauty. Dudley, to tell the plain truth, thought his pal looked simply frightful. He deplored, equally, his vulgarity. As he himself put it: " I prefer vice to vulgarity." For the cat's other qualities, he felt what he called " affectionate interest " of a tolerant kind.

Each now believed that he was engaged in the present adventure for his friend's benefit. Each shed, as it were, this air of willing sacrifice. Their immemorial code conveyed ideas plainly to one another, even in sleep, in silence. Their most absorbing, heated conversations, both talking at once perhaps, might thus appear to humans as motionless inactivity, while each yet knew exactly what the other felt and meant. They read easily the secret signs of code and signal that were used on earth long before strutting humans had made an appearance. And consciousness of superiority was inborn in both.

Thus, while Gilderoy, now in his cat-sleep, informed the parrot that he was going to London to see his pals, he was busy also with far, far deeper reflections—about himself. They were in challenge a little to the bird's orgy of self-praise.

" And now, for instance," he asked himself, his subtle intelligence working easily in sleep, " what heritage have *I*? And whence do I derive? "

The question seemed to sting him; though his eyes did not open, there was a snappy little sneeze.

" They talk of tigers—rubbish! They class me with the great felines—rhodomontade! "

His cheeks puffed out so that the whiskers sprayed like water from a half-choked hose. One paw stretched slowly further across the face, as he lay in a ball. The claws opened and shut gently.

" Though curiosity, they say, can kill me, they give me nine lives," he went on, the cheeks flattening, " admitting, by this very gift, their ignorance of my actual origin. The few who guessed my meaning on this undeveloped planet they burnt alive, they quartered and they racked them, they finally exterminated the whole inspired little band. Witches, wizards, sorcerers, all are gone with the broomstick into limbo. Misunderstood and unappreciated, I alone remain! "

He turned over into a three-quarter position upon his back, legs spread-eagled a little, feet hanging in the air and bent. The paw slipped from the face, uncovering the blunt unsightly nose.

" Yes, *I* persist. But as a mask, a symbol, a legend, a mysterious fantasy of what I really am. My true being is a hieroglyphic none can read; my pedigree, trailing down dim ages, is unknown; the inter-stellar spaces which produced me are unplumbed, and ever will be."

A single hanging paw fell to trembling; the eyelids quivered.

" My face," he went on, " remains inscrutable as of old, my gait as swift and silent, my green sight as marvellous in darkness, my voice as unearthly, my ways, generally, as ghostly and indecipherable as they always were."

His eyes opened a second; he saw the parrot in the rack, the head bent downwards a little as in an attitude of adoration—of himself as usual—motionless, a figure carved in stone. The sight stimulated the cat.

"They worshipped me in days gone by," his thought ran on. "Worshipped," he repeated, "*worshipped.* I was the favourite of Pasht. Bubastis housed me. I have lain mummied for centuries in stifling, airless heat, far underground. In my blood, my eyes, my walk, still lingers the haunting proof of this my divine service to a trumpery, unworthy race. The legend, the symbol, I now am cloak my deific origin. I have been, I remain, a deity. They call me aloof, indifferent, cold. It is the measure of their inferiority and ignorance. For who—" he suddenly sat up erect, his green eyes shining—"who that has been worshipped can respect his worshippers?"

There came no answer, but there came a pause. Dudley made no sign or movement. If his receiving apparatus, reflected Gilderoy, caught the message, so much the better: it might reduce his self-importance a bit perhaps.

"I despise," concluded the cat, "but chiefly am indifferent to, the Race who now think they master me. Alien, aloof, heartless to their endeavours,

care, affection, they describe me. Bah! Pfui!" he spat. "I am alien to their pettiness, that's all!"

He sneezed and purred simultaneously. Then, turning round carefully in a circle several times, he lay down again, tucked his blunt nose between his paws, and fell back into his cat-sleep once more.

Dudley had listened-in or had not listened-in. It was immaterial to the cat. A word, indeed, dropped down into that first-class carriage from the rack, but it was not a word that Gilderoy understood. "*Arcades ambo*" reached him before he plunged into real sleep. His tail twitched faintly at the tip, he made no other sign, and the train went rumbling on.

The parrot, doubtless, might have said a good deal in reply, but, if he had heard, he knew the value of restraint. Speech, indeed, was not actually essential to his enjoyment of life. If he used words, it was rather as a concession to an inferior world into which he had allowed himself to be adopted. It amused this human world to hear him talk. Equally, it amused him to see them thus amused. He used their own tricks of sound in order to deride them. The measure of their intelligence, as of his own masterly derision, was shown by the patronising judgment they passed upon his kindly efforts. "Oh, what a clever bird then! Pretty Polly! Clever, clever!" was the inadequate praise they bestowed upon his consummate parody of their idiocies.

Thus, while Gilderoy indulged his dreams, broadcasting them better than he knew, perhaps, Dudley merely turned upon the beast one glassy

and apparently sightless eye. He realized that the cat was off upon his own, and let him go. He was to enjoy the Adventure, and this moment of vainglorious indulgence belonged to it. "*Arcades ambo*," therefore, met the case, and Dudley let it go at that.

His glassy eye, none the less, observed the feline closely. That tight red ball was always worth watching, he well knew. There were signs about it even now that betrayed a secret process, something peculiar to the cat alone. It was just this mystery that he respected in the creature. The careless attitude of the body, apparently so innocent, betrayed an inner activity that escaped him.

Gilderoy, apparently sound asleep, was actually aware of something elsewhere and otherwise. His special powers operated. Before him rose, at this moment, the Day Nursery. He heard the voices, saw the faces, twigged the excitement.

"He eat him, eat him all up," the Governess was screaming.

"Impossible," cried Molly. "There's no sign of a fight even."

"He eat him, I tell you," the Governess repeated.

"But there are no loose feathers about, no blood," said the girl. "There's—*nothing*!"

"He eat everything, that nasty red cat," asserted the other.

"The claws—the beak—he couldn't have eaten *them*!" yelled Molly.

"All, all he eat," asserted the French woman with conviction. "He always mean to. He did."

"But Gilderoy loved him," moaned Molly, tears very close.

"He love him, yes," screamed the Governess. "But he leave—nozzing!"

Gilderoy turned over, rolled into a ball again and lay still. The parrot watched and listened, the train rolled on, thumping and rumbling to London. It drew at length into Victoria Station. It stopped. Gilderoy woke up, stretched, yawned, stuck one hind leg into the air and began to wash. Dudley, climbing down laboriously from his luggage rack, stood perched on the velvet seat and watched him closely. The bird's attitude was packed with expression:

"Cat," it said sternly, "While it is natural you should admire and respect my back, I should from now onwards enjoy seeing something of your own. In other words, you lead."

For some minutes there was no exchange between them. Neither spoke. Few people, indeed, observing this quiet pair, the one washing, the other clasping a beak, could have guessed the thoughts that crowded their minds as they sat silently side by side in the empty First Class Smoking Carriage at Victoria Station. An exchange of ideas was, nevertheless, in active progress between them. While the lordly bird watched his friend's ablutions, he discerned from the way the same spot was washed over and over again that that cat's mind, like his own, was occupied with quite other matters.

With two, at any rate, one being breakfast, the other, how to pass unobserved along the crowded

platform without their progress being unduly interrupted. For Gilderoy, the latter presented no problem, but Dudley's case was different. Since he could not use his wings much, he must use what offered—convenient shoulders, trucks of piled up luggage, a man's head, a woman's hat, anything, in fact, that might help to camouflage his dressiness, so that he would not appear too conspicuous.

It was the breakfast problem they solved first. They solved it promptly, and by signals only. Gilderoy suddenly stopped washing and stared fixedly into space. One hind leg pointed to the ceiling as though it hardly belonged to his body. Next he rose on his four feet, stretched, yawned, licked his whiskers and arched his back in a semi-circle. He strutted across the floor towards the seat where his friend perched, lowered his back to a more convenient line, and kept quite still while Dudley stepped down awkwardly and established himself safely about midway between the tail and head. Gilderoy then leaped with his rider through the window on the opposite side of the carriage where no platform was, and ran rapidly along the footboard in the direction of the guard's van.

"*Tempus fugit, tempus fugit*," exclaimed Dudley several times.

It was a precarious journey for the bird, but he balanced marvellously. They paused frequently on the way to explore empty carriages that had their windows open, with the result that Dudley made a good breakfast off scraps of biscuit, bread,

fruit, and even a few pea-nuts in a paper bag some child had rejected. Leaving his friend to this latter, Gilderoy raced on to the dark luggage van where he found enough spilled milk from several dozen cans to give him an ample meal.

In less than five minutes he rejoined his parrot, whom he found engaged in tearing the paper bag fiercely into little pieces with his claws and iron beak. Dudley, to an undiscerning eye, seemed in a state of fury as he attacked the paper bag. But Gilderoy knew simulation when he saw it.

"Better get a move on," he flashed. "You've fed, I see."

They left the carriage and stepped out boldly on to the platform. Having accomplished this without disaster, they then proceeded to examine very carefully the few people now left upon this platform.

CHAPTER VI

Cats know well how to conceal their purpose, to seize their opportunity, to cover their flight and to escape retribution.

M. RATON. *Sur l'education du Chat Domestique.*

THE train had discharged its first rush of passengers, including the old gentleman with the cigar, and the two ruffians were relieved to see that the platform was now less congested than it had been. This, too, had its dangers, however, since it rendered them more conspicuous. They stood side by side, examining its remaining freight. Both creatures assumed an air of careless nonchalance. Both knew perfectly well that they could not choose where they should go, but could only go where they were taken.

Who, then, should take them was the first question? Where, the second?

Dudley, though not afraid, yet did not feel entirely at his ease. Gilderoy walked to and fro, sniffing, perking his blunt muzzle this way and that. Suddenly his lightning eyes, all-observant as usual, picked up a significant detail. With a twitch of his tail he communicated it.

"Ah!" replied Dudley. Being able to see behind him, he did not turn his head. His comprehension was complete and instantaneous. His "ah!" conveyed that he agreed with his pal's choice.

A porter, pushing a laden truck, was approaching

them from the rear, and behind him, followed the "significant detail," an elderly lady of uncertain, rather waddling gait. She moved slowly, strenuously, yet without advancing much.

The two exiles, motionless side by side, examined her closely.

Their examination, due to immense practice, was as skilful as it was swift. Their experience of hosts and hostesses was, naturally, large, and the language of gesture an open book to them. From trivial outward signs they could read the heart; movement, facial expression, clothing, action of feet and pose of hands, these, being unconscious, gave naked indications of their owner's personality.

They noticed, thus, that the lady was considerably wrapped up. A careless observer might have suspected her of evading the Customs by wearing several silk quilts beneath her dress, but closer inspection showed that, scorning the modern figure, she merely feared the cold. This fact admitted her at once to Dudley's sympathetic heart, while Gilderoy made a special note of another thing—a contradictory expression in her eyes. These wore a distant, five-mile gaze, yet at the same time a close shrewd scrutiny of details nearer home. She might dream and speculate, the cat twigged, but she knew where the best milk and butter were to be obtained. A kindly face, moreover, both decided. Upon the top of her head, again indifferent to modern fashion, Dudley noticed a large hat with green feathers swaying in it.

Such, then, was the "significant detail" that now surged past them slowly, moving like part of a procession that turns upon itself, while getting a little forward at the same time. It was no ordinary female, they decided.

"I like her," from the parrot, and "She'll do," from the cat flashed simultaneously between the observant pair. For a moment, however, neither made a move. They watched. Neither the porter nor the lady had noticed them. When the moment for action came each animal would follow his own instinct independently.

"She's not thinking of anything very definite just now, but of many things. Her mind, at the moment, is wandering. It's not *here*. She won't notice me," was Dudley's masterly deduction from what he saw as, from the cat's arched back, moving with incredible lightness, he clambered up the thick clothing and reached the lady's attractive head-gear. He landed softly and settled down, camouflaged admirably against the green feather. His head glanced round in most expressive fashion.

"The secret of a successful and elevated life," it proclaimed, "is to live on others and let them carry one to death or glory!"

"Rather," the cat's action replied, "is it to remain inconspicuous, while yet attaining one's objective," as he dived unnoticed among the welter of dark bags and rugs upon the porter's truck.

The two schemers in this way proceeded along the platform past the ticket-collector, and approached a waiting taxi-cab. Here the procedure

needed tact as well as physical adroitness, lest they be noticed, Gilderoy as usual having the easier *role* of the two. He slipped in so slyly, indeed, that not even Dudley saw how he managed it. With the bird, as with his carrier, it was a more complicated business; he crouched as low as possible, while the lady, urged by the porter from behind, her limbs hampered by the mass of clothing, climbed slowly in and flumped down in her place with a stifled gasp. There was just room for the parrot to perch upright under the ceiling. The luggage had already been piled outside and inside. They were ready to start.

Touching his cap, the porter examined his tip, pocketing it with a significant glance at the driver, and slouched heavily away. But the taxi did not start immediately.

"Any address?" enquired this red-faced man over his hunched shoulder. His voice was rather surly; he had taken note of the porter's tip.

"Yes, yes, to be sure," the fare replied rather breathlessly. "I thought I'd told you. Aurora Mansions. That's Mildew Place," she explained, leaning forward a little too suddenly for Dudley's comfort. "Pimlico," she added, lowering her voice, as though she was ashamed of mentioning it. She leaned back again with equal suddenness. She sighed nervously. She breathed heavily.

But still the taxi did not start.

"Any number—Miss?" asked the man.

"14, 14, No. 14," cried the fare, leaning forward once more, then settling down somewhat as the sides of a boiled fruit-pudding collapse when the

insides have been removed. "I thought I'd already said 14," she repeated, with half apologetic nervousness. She was evidently afraid of taxi-drivers as a class. "No. 14," she repeated with that excess which the experts declare is a sign of hysterical tendencies.

The man uttered something inaudible, ran his yellow eyes over her, glowered, then turned and started his machinery with a sudden wrench.

"I perceive," Dudley commented to himself, having noted and disliked the yellow eyes, "that we shall now go like hell." He settled down cautiously, digging himself in, yet too cleverly for the presure to be felt. His comment, meanwhile, had reached the invisible cat. "I get you," signalled the wireless whiskers. Speed was a matter of complete indifference to him. The personality of the fare, on the other hand, might mean much. "The frump's all right," he added.

It was just this kind of commonness and lack of tone the fine old bird disliked in his companion. He shifted a foot, a faint shiver ran down his breast feathers. "I shall assist the lady," fell courteously from his face, "should the opportunity arise. As it well may."

"How?" asked the cat.

"Leave it to me," the bird flashed laconically, and retired behind his beak as from a futile discussion.

London life, obviously, was already sharpening their wits, extending their vocabulary as well. The change would benefit his friend and might modify his coarseness. His own Work, he felt

convinced, would benefit too. Pleased with his position at the moment, he fell to pondering. His own powers, for instance, delighted him. He possessed, came the pleasant reflection, as many voices as qualities of language. He could welcome or dismiss, as he deemed a particular situation demanded. Chuckling to himself, he remembered dismissing the Vicar, whose wheedling voice and stale odour of gaspers he detested. He had kept an obstinate silence for a long period while the cleric tried to make him speak. "But Polly is not talkative to-day; we must not bother the bird," in that wheedling tone at length exasperated him to the point where he really had to deal with the man. He used his loudest voice and with startling suddenness: "Goodbye, for the present! Goodbye, for the present!" was followed by a string of words that derived from sailors in far Southern Seas. And the shawl flung quickly over his cage was the very thing he wanted, for it shut out the man he loathed. As for the language that he offered, it was a sample merely, a test as it were. The fact that the Vicar hastily withdrew betrayed him. If dirt, the parrot held, is matter in the wrong place, language called "bad" is only language wrongly uttered. That *He* uttered it divinely, he knew perfectly well; he also knew, by the tone of voice, when phrases criticised him and therefore were not worth learning. The Vicar's "deep-learned in books but shallow in himself," in reply to Molly's praise of his own scholarly attainments, he had not even troubled to commit to memory.

While reflection pursued thus its pleasant course,

the taxi was getting under way. Making angry and vicious noises with its gears, it started slowly at first, but once out of the station yard it began to gather speed. It took a curious route, the lady noticed, but at first she did not interfere. She fidgetted and made grunting noises in her throat, leaning forward on a sudden impulse, then flopping back again, movements that incommoded the bird perched upon her hat. But she took no action. Once, finding her courage, she began: "But you're going miles out of your way the way you're going. . . .!" but her voice, dying away in the throat, was not loud enough to reach the man. Evidently, she was of the kind that must be worked up into a nervous anger before the point of action —invariably of exaggerated, explosive sort—was reached.

Owing to the size of the hat, its wearer was forced to bend her head, and Dudley found himself rather cramped, compelled to lower his proud neck and shoulders lest his skull knock against the ceiling as the ramshackle vehicle banged and tore along. Having, luckily, no crest, he managed fairly well, however, turning his head completely round and burying back and forehead among the feathers some way down his back. "Stet, stet, stet," he murmured to himself, maintaining his position with extreme difficulty, yet with adorable poise and grace as usual.

The taxi rattled; it shaved an island; it elicited language from the driver of a horse-van whose load they scraped perilously past; it swerved from side to side; it rocked.

They were racing at high speed up Constitution Hill, hardly the shortest route from Victoria to Pimlico, when the fare made her first real effort. " Please go more slowly," she cried, more air than actual sound in her voice. She tapped feebly on the glass. She hoped the driver would both hear and not hear; as though not quite sure whether she feared most the man or the smash. The man made no sign that he heard, for the vehicle rose almost on two wheels immediately, making the lady gasp with terror and clutch wildly at the window straps.

Dudley's skull, still buried among the feathers of his back, received a bump. The moment for giving his promised " assistance," he decided, had arrived. He raised his grand head slowly; cool and collected, he was; his eye noticed Gilderoy's red whiskers above a rug; he filled his lungs:

" Blastyergizzard! *Aurora borealis*! Swine-swine! Dudleydudleydudley. . . .! " he shouted in a male tone of fury. Expressions that followed he chose from the wife of a policeman he had once known, while the tone changed abruptly to an imitation of the fare. The voice, his loudest, rose easily above the rattle of the taxi.

The effect was immediate, and it was two-fold.

The lady collapsed backwards with such violence that the bird was nearly dislodged from his perch, and the driver jerked round with such startled suddenness that his hand, for an instant, dropped the wheel, leaving the taxi to its own devices. The choice between a lamp-post and an omnibus confronted it. Before it could decide, however,

the man's hand automatically dropped back upon the wheel; his foot, also automatically, found a brake; and a traffic block, obeying a white-clad arm, brought the vehicle to a grinding stop in the very nick of time. They were by St. George's Hospital, with the gates of the safer Park beyond. "Umph! Cuckoo!" reflected Dudley, noticing the hospital. The red whiskers had vanished, a flying leap having been thus avoided at the last minute.

The driver now looked round, his red face peering into the taxi with a bewildered expression. He searched for the owner of the recent male voice. His mouth opened and shut, but emitted no sound. Puzzled he certainly was, a little subdued as well, frightened even. Never before had he heard such language from a female fare. His bewilderment increased still more when he heard this fare now inform him, with the false courage of incipient hysteria, that she would "report you to the Police for bad language and assault and give the number of your taxi too. . . .!"

"Sorry, mum," he muttered, poking his head round the window. "It's the old keb, that's wot it is . . . never worked proper since the harmistice . . . besides I ain't *said* nothink meself . . . yet . . . not a single word I 'avn't . . . s'elp me gawd. . . ."

Dudley, meanwhile, remained motionless and invisible on his perch, silent too. Masterly inactivity, he decided, was his *role* just then. He was a trifle puzzled himself, perhaps. He could not know that folk with hysteria in the system may persuade themselves they have spoken when not a

sound has actually passed their lips. In her excitement, the fare doubtless assumed the voice from her hat was her own. Hunting for paper and pencil, meanwhile, she had dropped her reticule and stooped to recover its contents. The bird had enough to think of till she steadied down again at length. It was a moment for careful behaviour, for careful balance too, so far as he was concerned. He recalled a maxim his intoxicated scholar-host used years ago: "Live in such a way," he crooned very softly to himself, "that even the Coroner couldn't blame you!" The lady rose from searching the mat and Dudley, of course, rose with her. As she sat back in her seat, he disappeared from view again. His expression, as he sank away, was philosophical. Her own face was purple. The driver drummed black fingers impatiently on his wheel. The official white arm dropped.

The traffic-block now surged slowly forward like a single huge machine that uses its loose portions clumsily. It carried the taxi with it beneath the Arch. Once in the Park, adding another needless mile to the shortest distance, a reasonable pace brought back a pleasant sense of security to all on board.

"*Ad valorem ab initio à bas les boches*," murmured the parrot, in whose memory foreign words were always associated with a fuss.

"Keep quiet, can't you!" sniffed Gilderoy, entirely out of sight. It was sharply given, almost rudely.

"I enjoy the Park," remarked Dudley blandly, no window accessible to his screened eyes. The

perky tail, could the cat have seen it, added distinctly: "One sees one's own sort there, of course."

The squabble that seemed imminent had been neatly avoided in the usual way. Driving safely and pleasurably through the bright sunshine, the contents of the taxi, still alive, and breathing more or less heavily, now relapsed into a comfortable silence, until the vehicle at last drew up before a row of gloomy Mansions in a side street among the purlieus of Pimlico.

"We have arrived," Dudley broke the interlude.

Gilderoy glanced through a crack of the door. "It's our slum," he said in reply.

The fare groaned wheezily and began to fumble in her capacious reticule. The driver, having gone some three miles out of his way, looked at his meter with a satisfied smirk.

CHAPTER VII

Some day, when it is least expected, a Grey Parrot may suddenly wake up and begin, like the Baron's famous horn, to unwind everything that has been said to it for ever so long before.—W. T. GREENE.

THE taxi slowly began to disgorge its varied content. Like a bundle becoming unfastened, the lady climbed out in sections, the parrot crouching low among the protective feathers on her hat. Gilderoy was already on the pavement. He stood against the area railings with an air of having known the neighbourhood all his life, looking, indeed, as though he belonged to it, with his shabby coat, his torn ear, his patched eye. His flat cheeks bulged a trifle, evidence of excitement, but the patched eye has already noted every detail of his surroundings. He had managed his exit from the taxi so cleverly that not even the observant bird had seen it. He now seemed merely a common Pimlico street cat on the prowl, indifferent to the world.

The driver had also left his perch, and Gilderoy moved up and rubbed—carefully—against his legs while the man stood waiting for his money. The air was electric rather. The process of a nervous old lady laying her fate to a greedy bully of a driver pursued its slow course. A gloved hand burrowed fumblingly in the depths of the capacious reticule, whose indiscriminate contents

rattled; a flustered face peered anxiously about; a timid voice mumbled indistinct syllables, while the man stood silent, holding his hand out with a half insolent, half threatening air.

The biped and quadruped, one in the air, the other on the ground, watched the proceedings closely without appearing to do so, and each in his own way. They were already in swift communication:

"I got you here, you see," mentioned the bird proudly.

Gilderoy, staring down the street, gave a contemptuous sniff. Not even a milk-cart, much less a catsmeat-man, was in sight.

"Why?" he asked pointedly. A memory of "the houses of the great" stirred in him possibly.

"*Inter alia*," returned Dudley. It was the only thing he could think of for the moment. His body, besides, being concealed, could not convey freely what he felt.

The lady was now holding out some coins, mumbling tentative phrases as she did so: ". . . . the way you came that way was a long way out of your way . . ." it sounded like, "so that makes three and tuppence"—her hand thrust forwards—"with fourpence for yourself . . . and . . . er . . . thank you." Her face was alternately flushed and pale; her head jerked as though she felt the unusual weight of her hat perhaps. But the driver's face became instantly an assorted face, contempt and a yellow fury dominating the other ingredients. For a

moment he did not speak. He stood staring at the insignificant coins in his open palm.

"Get ready!" warned Gilderoy, peeping up. He made a sudden leap sideways, for the great boots had moved suspiciously.

"I was born ready," Dudley signalled back from his perch.

There was no time for more, as the man had begun to speak.

His audience, though later it grew larger, consisted at first of the two creatures and the lady. It was to the latter, however, that he addressed his inspired words. For they were inspired, his being had been stirred to its lowest depths, inspiration alone could have produced them.

The trio listened, spell-bound, as the words poured forth. They were voluble, ornate, delivered without hesitation. They described the lady's character and antecedents, referred to her appearance, the state of her health, and the length of days she might yet live. Included also was a brief impressionist picture of Aurora Mansions, and the general neighbourhood. An artist's palette is his servant, not his master, and if he sees carmine, ruby values he has a right to use them. The man evidently saw his picture *couleur de rose*, or, rather, *sang de bœuf*. The subliminal consciousness of this illiterate taxi-man was stirred. Freed of all limiting inhibitions, he delivered his overburdened psyche of a Message to the Race, to the female portions of the Race in particular.

This particular female member of the Race listened, and while she listened, trembled.

Her animal companions listened too, but they did not tremble. Each in his own way listened, and each had his own reactions. Gilderoy, unable to follow human speech as his educated friend could, noted his own colour rather frequently referred to, and disliked it. "Too much blood, I think," he flashed into the air. He grew angry and wanted to scratch. Slowly he began to make himself look big. His hair was up a bit.

Dudley, listening from a higher point of view, made no comment. He gave no sign of any sort. "It's a relief to him," he thought, with an understanding sigh. But his gorge was rising. He was again ready to give his assistance, when the right moment came. It came quickly enough. The man, in his opinion, went at last too far.

"Talkin' through yer ruddy 'at, I call it . . . !" rang down the open street.

And, since Dudley himself occupied the hat, he resented it. His gorge could rise no further. He intervened the more readily because he felt his pedestal shaking dangerously and feared he might at any moment be flung violently to the ground. Raising his grim, aristocratic beak above the feathers, he caught his pal's patched eye. It gleamed.

"Go it!" exclaimed Gilderoy. His claws were out.

Dudley went it.

His words issued, as it seemed, from the empty air. He chose his most horrible voice, a rasping,

hoarse voice acquired from a First Mate long ago. It was the driver's turn to listen. If his eloquence had been inspired, that of the parrot surpassed it easily. It made his best effort seem flat and insipid. It left him standing at the post. It was superb, it was *hors concours*. The adjectives, interspersed with *a fortoris* and *de profundises*, poured down Mildew Place in a flood of rattling glory. Aurora Mansions bathed rosily in a new significance. The First Mate, a master of language, would have been proud of him. A crowd began to collect, drawn by its magic to areas and windows. But no one could discover whence this hoarse male voice and his appalling language originated.

Upon two members of the audience the effect was striking and immediate. The lady, clapping her hands to her ears, began to scream. She wobbled dangerously, while the driver, recognising a master, and bewildered by a voice that apparently issued through the top of his fare's head, began to shake all over. He listened for a few moments to details about himself he had not known before; his jaw dropped; his eyes were glazed with superstitious terror; his red face blanched. And at this moment the cat, hissing and spitting, its hair erect, flew headlong towards him. He had a glimpse of blazing eyes, sharp teeth, of a red body launched towards him across the air. He could not know that a dog behind him was the actual cause of what seemed an onslaught on himself.

Giving a futile kick, and uttering the yell of

those who expect to be hurt, he turned, leaped into his seat, trod on the accelerator, and leaving behind him a hoarse echo of " Lord bli' me, it's a ruddy devil, two of 'em! " hurtled down the gloomy street and disappeared at a pace no policeman, had there been one in Mildew Place, could possibly have permitted. He also left behind him several brown pennies which were his tip, and a kind lady trembling on the pavement like a circular-cut box tree in a gust of sudden wind. She shook from head to foot, her legs threatened to give way beneath her any second, but her screaming ceased, for there was no breath left to scream with.

Gilderoy approached softly, tentatively and rubbed against her elastic-sided boots. " Prrrrrr . . . purrrrrr . . . purrrr," rose to her ear from the paving stones on which she shook to and fro. His gallant attentions, since he was not quite the glory he imagined himself to be, produced an unexpected effect. Feeling his touch, the lady looked down sharply, saw a ginger quadruped against her legs, found some more breath, and fell to screaming louder than before, while her head lowered itself so abruptly that Dudley, still clinging to his dignity among the feathers, was taken by surprise, and lost his hold. Wind in branches he could have managed, since there is rhythm in it, but not these unintelligent human jerks. He missed his step. He fell, scrabbling and squawking, down the whole length of her body, clutching her clothing with beak and claws as best he could until he reached the ground.

Silence followed. For a moment all was still. Dudley, having recovered his balance—composure he had never lost—stood on one foot in a position of great dignity, clasping his beak with his other claw and glancing down sideways at the world. Gilderoy, a few yards away, sat washing himself against the area railings, as though the basement had been his family home for generations. But the lady, their prospective hostess, seeing suddenly a large grey parrot with a red tail which apparently she had brought forth out of nothing, wobbled like a jelly shape that is just ready to collapse. Unable to scream owing to irregular breath, she gave a gulp of terror, and a second later was flopping up the steps at a speed and with an agility only real panic could produce. She disappeared into the shadows of the gloomy entrance hall of Aurora Mansions. A door banged. Another silence fell.

It was a moment, perhaps, when humans would have used their energies to take stock of the situation, to pull themselves together as it is called, to review the facts, at any rate. Not so, however, with the animals' world, it seems. The two scallywags found it just the moment for a friendly exchange on things in general. The hullabaloo meant little to them, an occurrence that called for no special explanation. They had long ago given up attempting to explain what humans did. They made, thus, no comment on what had just taken place. They merely had a little chat.

"I shall pluck some of my breast-feathers,"

announced Dudley, and proceeded to do so. "And then I shall go indoors." He fell to work at once.

"I shall have lots of pals," Gilderoy mentioned, indicating the roofs with one leg, while the other pointed down the street. While washing, he had mapped the immediate neighbourhood in detail Nothing had escaped his keen roving eyes. "A busy time for me." He struck an attitude, aware that his arrival in the neighbourhood had been duly noticed by numerous sharp eyes. He believed he looked interesting and important, comely certainly.

But Dudley kept his eyes glued to his breast feathers without looking at him. He knew that his friend's appearance was not engaging at the moment, that in fact he was peculiarly unsightly. His love did not falter, but he felt ashamed of the red, bolshevik, scraggy cat. The allusion to his position, moreover, had not escaped him, the hint that he himself might be without friends here in London, lonely. The cat, reacting to the excitement of the new surroundings, he noted too, was already a bit above himself. He therefore stopped plucking at his feathers; he stood motionless, trying to look as much like unbiteable stone as possible. And, as regards the loneliness he might experience, he found a solace for that too. It was something Molly said that helped him here. His Work occurred to him.

This mysterious Work the child talked about so much, what was it really? That it was true he knew; that it lay deep down inside his sensitive

being, he also knew. It had, moreover, something to do with companionship, for it was the suggestion of loneliness that now evoked it. Yes, he had some great work on hand, some *mugnnm opus*. . . . He was aware of a sudden gush of sentimental feeling, of self-pity almost. A tear rose to one eye, though he did not let it fall.

The minutes passed. A milkman's cans rattled. A postman's knock was audible far away but coming nearer. At the end of the narrow street the giant motor buses roared along the main thoroughfare, appearing and disappearing like engines of war, thundering to attack. A solitary taxi came crawling along the place. Mildew Place was awake.

"My position at the moment might be improved," decided the bird practically, conquering his other emotions.

Gilderoy caught the signal and glanced up. One eye ran down the street, the other indicated the stone staircase.

"Quaite," observed Dudley in his gentlest tone. He waddled across the pavement and began awkwardly climbing up the first step.

Watching him with approval, the cat showed it by marching down the street close against the area railings, his tail in the air, his flat cheeks smiling, his whole body throbbing with a deep purr as his ribs rubbed the iron bars. He liked the lady who was to be his hostess; the parrot liked her, too, paying her thus the greatest compliment in their power. They felt she was kind, soft-hearted, generous, if poor; they could

impose upon her. Only the poor, they knew, were generous, to the rich this virtue is denied.

Dudley, meanwhile, climbing laboriously, observed his friend disappearing down the street and promptly summoned him. He wanted help, for one thing. But he used no silent, secret signal this time. He used his army voice:

" Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*! " he bawled his loudest, ignoring the attention it must draw to himself.

CHAPTER VIII

So strong is the instinct for companionship in all parrots, but especially in the Greys . . . that perhaps this pining for society may be a factor in bringing about the death of so many of these amiable and most unhappy birds. . . .—W. T. GREENE.

AT which moment the door opened and the lady reappeared, followed closely by the Hall Porter of Aurora Mansions in a dirty blue suit with tarnished gold buttons and trousers frayed into whiskers at the bottom. He wore shapeless leather slippers. He carried a cloth. The parrot, taking in these details instantly, noted also out of the back of his head that the cat had come to a halt against the railings, some twenty yards away, invisible to all but himself.

He preened himself for the admiration that he knew must come, and at the same time said something aloud that would stimulate interest and curiosity by being inaudible. It was well to conquer this couple at the start. "Cuckoo!" he gabbled in a voice too low for them to hear the words exactly. "Cuckoo!"

It was here that the creatures displayed their superiority over human beings. The latter, confronted with a sudden decision amid conflicting issues, almost invariably fail. They over-act or under-act. Their first cry is "Oh, let me think a moment first!" Only when the crisis is past do they perceive the line of action which would

have met it adequately. With the world inhabited by Dudley and Gilderoy the case was different: each thought instinctively, observed all details simultaneously, came to a decision immediately, and conveyed this decision to one another without a second's delay.

These faculties, therefore, now operated as usual. The pair of rascals easily met the strain upon their wits.

They had reached London, but they had as yet no home—Aurora Mansions if not a palace would provide a temporary *pied à terre;* food, warmth and protection would be assured. The cat, naturally, could manage these essentials for himself; he had the freedom, more or less, of any house he cared to enter. Dudley, on the other hand, must descend to diplomacy; he had to prepare the way. It was, besides, his nature to do things decently.

Of all which, the slow-witted humans now coming slowly down the steps, of course, knew nothing. They merely saw a large grey parrot with a red tail standing disconsolately on the lower steps, glancing up with its head cocked on one side. The cat they did not see at all, nor would a stray cat anyhow have claimed attention. So undistinguished, indeed, did Gilderoy, despite his auburn beauty, seem to the Porter and the lady, that they did not even notice his tigerish outline shoot past their legs and vanish through the open door behind them. The animal, none the less, performed this feat of *leger-de-pieds* with consummate ease; and, perched half-way up the

stairs inside now watched the parrot's method of entering the house in his turn.

Dudley's method was not complicated. Like all great souls, he saw life closely, but he saw it whole. He desired to enter the lady's flat peaceably: he did so. Assuming that innocent air by which he somehow contrived to make his formidable mandibles look harmless, the expression in his eyes positively invited kindness. He looked, indeed, benign. One claw, held aloft in the air, opened and closed with slow precision.

"Leave it to me, Mum," the Porter reassured the nervous woman, after examining the bird cautiously from a distance. "I know them birds," and reaching down, he advanced slowly, holding out a very dirty hand with an air of confidence Dudley saw he did not feel. The cloth was flung over his arm. He wriggled his fingers about so that the grimey wrist-band of a flannel shirt showed itself. He uttered the formula "Pretty Polly! Pretty Polly want a cracker!" in what he evidently considered a most ingratiating voice. His rather bloodshot eyes ogled to the best of their ability. Dudley stood motionless as if carved in stone.

"Oh, *please*, mind it doesn't nip you, Porter!" warned the lady from the rear. "One can *never* trust those birds—until they *know* you," she added with piercing insight. "Their bite is *terrible*, I believe!"

"It's the voice that does it, Mum," the man told her confidently. "These grey ones in partickler is very sensible to the 'uman voice,"

And he continued to hold his hand out and wriggle his fingers, while repeating the "Pretty Polly" formula without a pause.

Dudley, watching the man sideways, still made no movement. If there was one thing he had instantly loathed about this Hall Porter of Aurora Mansions it was the quality of his voice. It rasped him. It was worse than even the Vicar's wheedle. He disapproved likewise of his filthy hand. But above all, he despised the fellow because of his pretension that he was familiar with parrots and understood them, whereas it was obvious to Dudley that he had never met a Grey Parrot, much less a King Grey Parrot, in his life before. For that voice alone he would have nipped the nasty finger to the bone; the man's pretentions made him want to scream his loudest; the hated formula gave him a feeling of positive nausea.

He remained, for all that, diplomatic, his feelings under stern control. Great simple soul that he was, the grand bird never lost sight of his objective for a moment. He desired to enter Aurora Mansions peaceably and without a fuss; he now took immediate steps to do so.

They were decided, though not entirely straightward steps. With a sideways movement, but one of matchless grace, he avoided the filthy hand and wriggling fingers, and planted his feet, each in turn and delicately, upon the man's sleeve just above the objectionable wrist-band. He wiped them first, it seemed, upon the cloth. He then, deliberately but very slowly, marched up the

whole length of the arm, and planted himself securely upon the blue shoulder, where a strip of spotty brass announced that the coat was actually a uniform. Settling himself, he stood motionless, gazing down into the lady's upturned countenance. She had watched the proceedings with the greatest intentness, anxiety and admiration about equally mixed. Dudley, with an expressionless eye, now returned her stare.

He did more than that, however—he at once introduced himself. And he did this in his own inimitable way: he uttered aloud the most gracious and lovely word he knew, the very sweetest, yet too low to be clearly audible:

"Dudleydudleydudley," he mumbled affably, for what could be more beautiful than his own name, he felt?

"There you are, Mum," exclaimed the porter proudly in his best shilling voice, though his head shrank a trifle to one side, the dreaded beak being within an inch of his ears and cheek.

"Dudleydudleydudley" crooned the parrot in his softest tone, "nolimetangere . . . cuckoo-cuckoo . . . !" controlling a fierce desire to bite the ugly neck until it bled, and winning both the Porter's and the lady's hearts, as he intended, at a single stroke.

"An' a fine talker, too!" the man explained. "That was Spanish he used just then. Pretty Polly! Pretty Polly!"

He turned and led the way upstairs to the first floor flat, followed by the admiring tenant, who in due course, the man hanging about until his

purpose reached her brain, fumbled for the expected coin. Passing red Gilderoy, who had already assured himself that no tame cat lived in the flat, they entered a rather dark apartment containing a kitchen, a narrow passage, a tiny hall, and four or five diminutive but fairly pleasant rooms. The place was nicely furnished, the tenant obviously a woman of taste, if of humble means.

"'Ave you anything in the wy of a caige, Mum?" enquired the Hall Porter. He had lowered the parrot on to a table where it began to bite the cloth.

The lady mentioned an empty canary cage somewhere in a cupboard, and this having been produced after considerable search, blown into by the objectionable porter to get the dust out, and a tiny perch made secure, Dudley, bending his proud head, stepped silently into it with as much dignity as its space permitted.

"Any time you want a bit of 'elp with the bird, Mum," mentioned the porter, departing with his shilling in his pocket. "I understand them parrots, you see."

The lady thanked him. "I must advertise," she began, "it's been lost or stolen or something," and then, having provided a saucer of water and sent out her char-cook-general, to buy some seed, she flopped into a chair and stared at her new possession in a state of semi-collapse.

The new possession, not far from a state of collapse himself, did not return the stare. Although he liked her, as already stated, he did

not care especially about her appearance. He felt she was ineffective somewhere . . . this tiny cage, for instance, with its odour of long disuse . . . water in a saucer . . . seed of indifferent quality . . . a general air of being mastered by her surroundings instead of, as with himself, the opposite. He, therefore, did not return her stare, nor, indeed, take any notice of her at all. Tasting the meal provided, he retired into himself. He clutched his thin perch with one foot, raised the other into his tummy feathers, made up his mind that this would be a temporary visit only, and decided that the next time the Porter put his hand within reach he would bite it to the bone.

He remained silent, he did not even produce his infinitesimal gabble, he neither swore, nor sang, nor whistled, nor did any language occur to him at the moment as worth uttering. Something poignant, however, was going on inside him, for he trembled slightly. His breast feathers quivered. The recent excitement, though mastered, had been considerable. It had deeply stirred him. He remembered things Molly had said . . . he thought of his Work . . . there was some great thing he had to do . . . some important production . . . consummation of his long life, as it were. . . . He saw a green sea of foliage waving in the wind and sloping upwards into a sky of turquoise blue . . he saw a hollowed limb, a nest . . . he heard a squawk that to him was the sweetest music in the world . . . he felt . . . he felt . . .

A glimpse of something red caught his eye,

interrupting these stimulating but rather confused reflections, and he gulped down his emotion promptly. It was a bit of Gilderoy that projected from beneath the divan on to which his hostess had collapsed a few moments before. This fragment of a hind paw alone was visible. It set his mind working in a new direction. "I've got him here safely," he reflected. "He may now enjoy himself in his own way."

This, plainly, was the cat's intention, and his independence had already asserted itself. He had made himself quite at home.

The first part of their adventure was over, yet each knew quite well that they stood on the threshold of another. A life of danger and excitement, of change and novelty, had begun, though neither could guess what might further be in store for them.

"Leave it to me," was Dudley's attitude on his tiny perch in the cramped cage. And if Gilderoy made no reply it was because he was sound asleep. Their hostess, Dudley perceived, seemed in danger of dropping off herself. He therefore closed his own eyes too, and prepared for the recuperative nap his morning's exertions demanded and deserved.

"Good-night, Dudley, kiss Mother—good-bye for the present," he murmured under his breath. And the flood of golden dreams then rose and swamped him.

CHAPTER IX

Occasionally it will happen that an otherwise tractable bird will pick up words of an objectionable character.
W. T. GREENE.

JUSTICE is not done to the ease and completeness with which animals understand their surroundings, their human surroundings especially, and draw intelligent deductions therefrom. The superior complacency of the human withholds here credit that is overdue. They judge us with uncanny accuracy, see into us with far deeper insight than we suppose.

They achieve this, largely, by omitting what is unimportant; they concentrate upon essentials only. Perceiving the outstanding characteristic, they grab it, concentrate on it with the one pointedness of the yogi, then act upon it. Their slogan, "Do it Now," was borrowed by America centuries later. The sub-human world is marvellously practical. It does not shilly-shally. It knows what it wants—and does it. And its knowledge comes from understanding its environment.

The ruthless wasp, wishing its young to have fresh food at birth—forthwith stings its prey into a state of paralysis and leaves it to be eaten alive; birds finding their insect-food growing scarce—instantly flit to Abyssinia where it is plentiful; eels preferring to breed in very deep water, promptly slip down their British streams growing

bigger eyes *en route*, for a run of several thousand miles into the unlit ocean depths, cuckoos. . .

But, trespassing on Dudley's private wisdom here, it is only useful to remark that he did not use one of his favourite expressions idly. "Cuckoo" was a symbol. Both creatures, omitting what was not important, had picked out the essential point about their hostess—that she was kindly and generous to the point of being easily imposed upon by others. And if Gilderoy turned up his blunt nose at Mildew Place as being hardly among the "houses of the great," the wise old parrot had a complete reply should he care to use it—that he referred, of course, to hearts, not coronets.

The bird, however, sizing up Mrs. de Mumbles, had experienced, as is well known to be a way with King Grey Parrots, a sudden passionate and admiring affection for this lady. Having swiftly sized her up, he then instantly adored her. It was a *coup de foudre*. She enlisted all his sympathies; any help or protection he could give was already hers, without price and whether she asked for it or not. He had noticed the porter's attitude, as, equally, the demeanour of the man at the station and the taxi-driver. He now divined that the char-cook-general, as others of the staff he might encounter presently, were, similarly, all —brigands. He twigged this in the way animals do twig what's going on. Meanwhile, however, he held his beak about it. Time for action was certainly not yet. He possessed *facile princeps* that mysterious sense of "coincidence" by which

parrots produce the right words at the right moment. His attitude just now, therefore, was *verb sap.* and Leave it to me. He was content with that.

On the threshold of losing consciousness, however, he was able to note, and with pleasure, that his friendly advances had been understood and appreciated and that his passion was reciprocated.

"He's talking—talking to *me!*" he caught just before he took his happy forest slope in dream. "Oh, the adorable bird! What a darling! I shall simply love him!" Then, following him into sleep, as he was carried gently across the corridor: "It'll be warmer for him in my bedroom . . . and I must get him a bigger cage. . . "

Warmer it certainly was, he dreamily observed, since a large coal fire burned fiercely and all the windows were tightly closed.

Mrs. de Mumbles—Leopold—born of a Russian mother, was the widow of a rich and distinguished man, so occupied with his distinction during life that he omitted to leave her enough to live on after his death. Ignoring this fact, however, she flatly refused to change her scale of existence. She was, therefore, invariably in debt, even for butter, medicine, milk and fish. Her scheme of life, moreover, did not include boredom as an ingredient. Her flat, for all its murk, its lack of space, was a social centre of sorts, herself its attracting focus. She possessed that vitality which defies the years; she radiated kindness, sympathy, love of her fellow-men, provided they were inter-

esting. Her *joie de vivre* was seen as quenchless. She was young. Divested now of numerous outer wrappings, it was obvious that, if oddly shaped, she was yet of a neat and lively figure. Also, as the parrot was quick to discover even in sleep, she was voluble, particularly on the telephone, which he labelled at the very start with faultless diagnosis her "*sine qua non.*"

The service of the flat, to glance ahead a moment, was irregular, exotic, uneconomical; instead of one efficient servant, there was a horde of helpers, called in as occasion required, and, naturally, self-helpers, too. Chief of these, and the one fixture, however, was the char-cook-general, Mrs. Dibbs, wife of a Kilburn policeman. And Maria, semi-permanent helper, was their daughter.

Now Dudley, with his instinctive discernment developed by long experience, disliked Mrs. Dibbs and Maria as whole-heartedly as he liked their mistress. From the latter's habit of talking to herself, regardless who was present, he quickly selected a word he felt described them faithfully. Thief he already knew, of course, but "*ce sont tous des brigands,*" being in constant use, supplied him with this extra word. He soon came to use the two together, adding a sea-faring adjective that mixed rather well, he thought: "—— thief brigand," had a sonorous quality that pleased him.

It was the telephone that dragged him back from his dream of scented forests where he was at peace. During his happy nap preparations for a tea party that afternoon had been in progress,

and he woke to a consciousness that the bedroom was rather crowded. Mrs. Dibbs and Maria were admiring him, the porter, holding a larger cage, was at the door. Maria, he instantly realized, was a horror. The porter he had already judged. Gilderoy, the bird noticed the moment he opened his eyes, was nowhere.

His eye, wandering further, took in other details swiftly. One side of the room, thus, consisted almost entirely of bottles. These were of every conceivable shape and size, pasted with multi-coloured labels from a startling red to a dingy pink, and containing liquids, powders, pills, salts, crystals and cachets. They were medicine bottles, evidently; the shelves of an open cabinet were packed; the wall was like a chemist's shop. His hostess, the parrot drew the obvious deduction, was ill, very ill, ill with countless complaints. And this intensified his sympathy with her. Was not he himself, as Greene mentioned, liable to plague, dysentry, pneumonia and fits! He could have a cough and take drops for it as well as anyone.

On the other side of the room he saw a tall-boy, books arranged neatly on the top; there were not many of these, but they were well thumbed, evidently in constant use. Having lived himself for years in a library, he knew how revealing books were of their owner's character, and he now noted with interest the lady's sources of daily inspiration. There was, thus, a telephone book, a peerage, a Christian Science Bible, a stout volume of *Your Health and How to Keep it,* and a *Who's Who.* At the

end of the rack, leaning away from these well-thumbed volumes, as if contemptuously, was a stately book whose pages seemed uncut. Glistenningly new, it bore Cambridge University Press upon its back, and its title was *Plato: The Symposium and The Pheadrus*. It looked, Dudley decided, extremely handsome.

Next he fell to examining his new cage. It held a water receptacle, a seed-pan, a good thick perch, but no bit of hard wood for him to bite. It was clean and airy, however. He began exploring it. Climbing to the top, he clung to the curved bars and swinging gently with his head to the floor, regarded the world upside down, and found it good.

"Dudleydudleydudleydudley," he commented in his happy little voice.

Mrs. de Mumbles, being at the telephone, did not notice the remark, but Mrs. Dibbs, coming in at that moment to fuss about and see how things lay—loose little things, as it were—forgot her original intention and came up to observe the bird at close quarters.

"Ain't you just a luffely birdie!" she mumbled, smiling at him. "And such a 'andsome red tile you've got, 'aven't you now!"

Her perfume, as her quality of voice, offended Dudley, so that he made no reply, merely returning her stare from his upside down position. His frigid glare must have disconcerted anyone less thick-skinned. He looked through her as though she was not there. He ignored her. He was studying her, none the less; his mind was not

idle; he was debating whether it was worth while to say anything. And while reviewing various phrases, yet selecting none, Mrs. Dibbs, as was only right, continued her flow of admiring praise.

Her mumbled utterance, however, was completely drowned by a torrent of vociferous speech across the room.

"Hullo! Are you there? . . . Who's speaking? . . . No, I'm Mrs. de Mumbles. . . Wrong number. . . Ring off, please. . . Exchange, I asked for Mayfair not Victoria. . . . Bother! You've cut me off again. . . . Hullo! Give me the supervisor. . . . *Ce sont tous des brigands*! Hullo! Hullo . . . !"

She turned slowly like a top while her song continued, till the long cord entangled her, and Dudley, watching with his other eye, wondered what this particular illness was and which bottle she would presently seize from the cabinet and gulp down with a wry grimace. For he knew illness when he saw it, and all his sympathy was stirred.

"Any hope, Doctor?" he gabbled softly, choosing a sick-room phrase from earlier days. "'Ave a good time!"

"I shall complain to the directors! This service is atrocious! That's the third time you've given me the wrong number . . . !" drowned his little offering, as the lady began to turn in the opposite direction, passionately unwinding herself again. And it was as she turned, presenting her back to the room for a moment, that Dudley saw a thick, dirty hand move cautiously towards

the tall-boy behind him, where the pile of coppers lay ready for the telephone box. He watched this hand, he saw the fingers stretch, he observed them push two pennies close to the edge, he heard the coins fall soundlessly on to the soft floor carpet, and the same moment the hand was quickly withdrawn, and the cumbrous figure of Mrs. Dibbs stooped to pick them up. But she did not replace them on the tall-boy, the hand went towards her apron pocket instead. At which instant, using his marvellous sense of coincidence, Dudley produced a loud sentence that, he felt, was appropriate: "—thief! — thief, brigand!" he bawled in a rough male voice.

Startled out of her wits, trembling, she jerked herself upright. She said things. She was under the impression that she spoke under her breath, but her excitement was such that her language was audible far beyond the cage. Mrs. de Mumbles heard and turned sharply, her telephoning finished for the moment. She was angry. The char-cook-general faced her smilingly.

"'e's talking, mum," she said calmly.

"Oh, it's the parrot!" exclaimed her mistress. "I thought at first it was ——" She stopped abruptly. A char was difficult to replace, wages were owing, too. "It *is* a talker, isn't it?" she finished blandly.

"Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*!" screamed Dudley in his shrillest tone.

"Oh, dear, we must stop that squawking," cried Mrs. de Mumbles, clapping her hand to her ears. "I wonder what he wants!" When she

uncovered again the word " thief " was once more in the air.

Mrs. de Mumbles smiled in spite of herself, and Mrs. Dibbs observed the smile.

" It keeps on saying ' Gilderoy,' mum," she informed her employer, getting her word in first, " so that's per'aps the name of the family where 'e lives. If it was put in the advertisement——."

" Thief, brigandthief! " yelled the parrot simultaneously.

" These birds 'as their naughty wyes, I've 'eard too, mum," Mrs. Dibbs tried to drown him. " They steal a bit sometimes. 'E's been told off before now, I shouldn't wonder."

The front door bell rang, the telephone bell rang, Maria, who was very big, stumped heavily down the passage, Mrs. Dibbs said in a loud voice, "There's the bell, mum," and Mrs. de Mumbles groaned audibly, making impatient observations to herself about callers, brigands, bells, having no time to get ready, and feeling very ill. She jerked across to the telephone. While waiting for the call, she kept repeating "Hullo, Hullo, Hullo! Is that you? Who are you? Supervisor, supervisor!" and staring straight at the parrot as she did so.

Accepting the compliment, and making a note of certain of these words for future use, Dudley realized that the little scene was ended. He had established himself as protector, at any rate. He and his hostess were friends and allies. The relationship was settled, and that was sufficient for the moment. He might now resume his interrupted nap again. He promptly did so. A moment later, eyes closed tight, feet planted securely in the centre of his nice thick perch, he floated back to the green branches with a forest of green leaves. A scented wind blew softly through his feathers, the sun was hot, countless pals and cronies squawked to him across the pleasant shade. One in particular, with bright eyes and gorgeous tail, floated down towards him through the sparkling air and perched on the swaying bough at his side. They were close enough to touch beaks and feathers. He caught the plash of a purple sea far, far below. His golden dreams rose up and swamped him. He dreamed of his mysterious Work. . . .

CHAPTER X

It will soon (in captivity) develop a surprising sharpness of intellect.—W. T. GREENE.

God made the cat that man might have the pleasure of caressing the tiger.—M. MÉRY.

MEANWHILE the business in the flat went on in earnest. The Press said the season had begun, and Mrs. de Mumbles had come up from the country to prepare for one of her famous tea parties. There was much to be done. From the point of view of the helpers, permanent and otherwise, she herself was the chief thing to be "done"; but she was too occupied with her own immediate duties to bother about this. The invitations had gone out. She had to get herself ready.

These duties she performed to the incessant accompaniment of front door and telephone bells. Adroit from long practice, a certain system somehow emerged from the confusion. The noise, being continuous, did not disturb the dreaming bird who, even in sleep, kept one eye open, and both ears certainly. At intervals, thus, though too softly, sweetly, to be audible, he would say "Cuckoo" and "Hullo," the latter sometimes extended into "Hullo, supervisor." Mrs. Dibbs and Maria threw him vicious glances in passing. They, too, had their plans. Pickings on entertainment days were good. Mrs. Dibbs he had at once christened "Ma."

The stream of callers continued steadily till noon. A female secretary, engaged for these occasions, arrived to check over the morning's post quota of acceptances and refusals; a masseur, to keep Modom's body supple; an old Hungarian woman to manicure her nails; a coiffeur to arrange her hair. The confectioner brought cakes, the milkman cream, the florist flowers, all demanding cash payment at the door. There were scenes, long noisy arguments, language of a kind, and then the difficulty of settling these trifling sums in cash, for no one ever had any change, and pencils for signing receipts were also lacking. Coiffeur, masseur or manicurist supplied these requisites. There was a steady coming and going of messenger boys, and not a few tradesmen who refused to leave goods until "amounts previously owing" were settled in cash. Telegrams arrived as well, and a man with six extra chairs. Maria, who had "Jest looked in in case Mother wanted a 'and," supervised the arrangement of these latter in corridor and drawing-room, while Mrs. Dibbs, with her gift of ready talk, managed the more obstinate among the collectors. It was a lively and tumultuous morning. Towards noon arrived, too, a smart maid, borrowed from a friend, who was to announce the guests, and her married sister, who was to preside behind the tea and coffee tables.

When the day was over, none of these would retire without their pay in cash, nor without various pickings of one sort or another. Maria, in particular, invariably withdrew to Kilburn,

her naturally ungainly figure swollen to conspicuous proportions. Even jampots had been known to retire with her—before Dudley came on his kindly little visit.

Mrs. de Mumbles, though aware of the general situation, accepted it with a kind of tolerant grumbling. Perhaps she was too lazy, perhaps she wanted her energy for other things, or it may be she felt herself unable to cope with it. She had allowed the system to grow upon her till it seemed impossible to put it right without involving a disruption of the little impecunious household. She would be servantless, no shops would bring supplies. What fluid money she had available she needed for telephones, messenger boys and helpers. Live and let live, was the result.

"They'll all adore the parrot," she observed at intervals. Dudley would be a great addition to her party, a kind of surprise. "They'll think I've taken to a pet," she chuckled. "And he's such a handsome bird, too. I wonder where he escaped from, the rascal!"

"'e's a biter, mum," ventured Maria, in the room at the moment.

"A biter?" cried Mrs. de Mumbles. "How do you know?"

"You can tell from 'is eye," Maria informed her. "It's a wicked eye 'e's got."

"Do they hurt?"

"To the bone, mum, with a reel biter," returned Maria, beginning a long story about blood poisoning.

" Then you'd better not go near him," Mrs. de Mumbles cut her short. " Parrots know whom they like. They don't trust everybody." She still chuckled inwardly over the bird's recent announcement. " I wonder whether he's a male or a female? "

" Oh, male, mum, I shouldn't wonder," said Maria, choosing instantly. It seemed safer on the whole, she thought. " 'E looks a 'e," she added. " The language, too."

" Then he won't breed in here," suggested Mrs. de Mumbles vaguely.

" Not 'ardly, Mum," agreed Maria, " though some birds, I've eard, do lay in captivity, when they've got a mind to."

" What——eggs? " enquired the other, surprised.

" Before dying," Maria informed her. " It's a sign of death, they say, because my father, 'e knew a bird once. . . "

" Please see about the chairs, the extra chairs," Mrs. de Mumbles again cut her short. She was listening to something the manicurist was saying about the bird's great beak. When beaks grew too long, the old Hungarian explained, they had to be cut, or the bird could not bite its food. She didn't do that sort of thing herself, but she knew a man who might see to it, perhaps. Most of the visitors to the bedroom that morning had something to say about the new visitor. The coiffeur, praising the plumage, asserted that it needed oil. He had some very special oil for feathers he could send along. The masseur

spoke about parrot muscles which, he explained, were "subjec' to stiffening owing to catarrh." Parrots were very liable to chills and rheumatism. The majority of telephone calls, too, included something about the bird, so that Mrs. de Mumbles came to the conclusion her unasked visitor was a distinct acquisition that she must try and keep. Its food would not cost much, the cage she had already. And, luckily, she kept no cat. For several telephone calls had referred to the danger of the London cats.

The gist of all this idle chat had been duly absorbed by its principal subject, for Dudley's hearing, as explained, was marvellous, even in sleep. It was flattering, he accepted it with modest pleasure. To be the centre of interest was his natural due.

It was a reference to the London cats that first drew him away from his happy forest of dream and turned attention to something other than his own person. Cats — London cats — Gilderoy! Where, all this long time, *was* Gilderoy, he asked himself? But he found no answer, he dismissed the matter from his thoughts at once. His eyes opened for a second, encountering the head of his hostess being coiffed a few feet away, and gazing a moment at her, a phrase from the intoxicated scholar's household occurred to him. "*Absit omen*," he said very softly, then closed his eyes again and returned to his companions in the trees, preening his feathers a little before he did so.

Gilderoy, meanwhile, had made the most of

his opportunities by leaving the flat—he knew an "*appartment*" when he saw one—and inspecting the roofs in the immediate neighbourhood. No one had yet noticed his presence. He made his exit by the kitchen window from what he considered an overcrowded dwelling. Before he did so a mouse in a quieter bedroom had also left the flat, and his tongue had sampled the quality of the London milk as well. He was feeling his oats accordingly, and the London roofs this fine March morning afforded him fresh air and entertainment. He felt pleasantly stimulated, full of beans he called it. Later, of course, he would have to be introduced to his hostess and the staff, and the parrot's help might be needed. He knew the bird would be the centre of attraction at first, and he was best out of the way till this nonsense was over. He resented a little, perhaps, his friend's habit of monopolising interest, but his native indifference soon mastered this. The fuss people made about the old bird he considered absurd. He must be a female after all, he decided.

His red head occupied with these reflections, his patched eye keenly roaming, he explored the roofs within easy access, observing numerous other cats where human eyes, among this forest of chimneys, would have seen no living outline. He judged these instantly, picking out friends

and enemies, and knowing male or female at a single glance. Exits and entrances he likewise noted, ways of escape and corners where to hide. Nothing eluded his vigilant optics. His whiskers twitched, his tail went up, he shook his paws like lightning. He yawned, he stretched, he turned in slow examining circles. Occasionally his eyes peeped upwards into the air where swallows darted and pigeons wheeled from loftier buildings. But no expression showed on the flat ugly face. The soft blunt muzzle quivered very slightly, the bright unwinking eyes took in the facts. No more than that. Observation was detailed, absolute, comprehensive, but no action resulted.

For Gilderoy, despite his appearance, felt that birds were a line of adventure it was nicer not to explore too closely. It led too near home. Instinct, of course, was instinct, yet he recognised here a danger zone. He had a feathered friend; friendship and appetite, unless some day the *force majeure* of exceptional circumstances insisted otherwise, he must not combine. The claims of friendship, though irksome sometimes, must be respected. Gilderoy did respect them. He was a decent beast. There was a kind of intimacy that intruded too closely upon privacy. He drew a line. Dudley, in any case, he felt sure, was pretty tough. His age alone was unattractive.

Choosing now a dizzy edge, with a drop of fifty feet into a courtyard below him, he dozed comfortably in the morning sunshine. The grin of content seemed carved upon his flat face. The cheeks were not puffed, the whiskers motionless,

the tail lay coiled among his tucked-in feet. It's tip hung in space. There was nothing to distinguish him from an ordinary stray London cat, numerous specimens of which were doing precisely what he was doing. All the Mildew Place cats, it seemed, were taking their morning sunshine on the tiles. Each one of the horde had, likewise, noticed Gilderoy and sized him up in a twinkling. He was not to be trifled with, they saw. The London freemasonry was a highly developed organism.

"None of them's got a King Parrot for a pal," was Gilderoy's last reflection under his flat-topped skull as he dropped away into a pleasant cat-sleep on his dizzy edge.

And while the two uninvited visitors was thus each minding his own business in his own quiet way, behaving admirably, the Tea Party in the flat below began to move. The table was spread, the guests arrived, Mrs. de Mumbles receiving them, the flood of conversation roared. To Dudley, listening, it was like the roar he once knew on the parrot's peak in Princes Island, when the whole vast spread of his native forest, stretching to the sky, echoed with the squawking, screaming concourse of collective speech.

His cage was placed where all could see him, and the story of his capture, exaggerated out of all recognition, was given over and over again, gaining new detail with each repetition. He had, apparently, bitten the porter, made countless eloquent remarks, had whistled, sung, spoken several languages, and, since he was now happy

and comfortable, had obviously escaped from a home where he was not kindly treated. Dudley, the Grey King Parrot with the red tail, was admired, petted, coaxed to speak, then abused for his obstinate silence, by numerous visitors of either sex.

"Why should he talk if he doesn't want to?" said a big, eye-glassed man from one of the embassies.

"They know when they're well off," commented a lady. "They're uncanny birds. My husband once . . . " and she slipped into an interminable and pointless story about a bird that proved to have been, after all, a mere cockatoo.

"They live for ages," remarked another, "some say for a thousand years——"

"And no one," interrupted a third, "ever knows their sex, I'm told."

"Because both sexes lay eggs," commented a fourth, "even in captivity."

"It's lucky you don't keep a cat, Mrs. de Mumbles," from a fifth, "proverbial enemies, aren't they?"

Dudley, listening to the chorus of chat that never ceased, gave no sign that he did so. Aware that he was the observed of all observers, he remained adorable, but silent. He kept himself to himself; it was quite enough that he offered himself for admiration. Mute and dignified, he watched the game, the one unpardonable fault in which, he noticed, was to be without speech. To have nothing to say was unforgiveable. The players, even when they said nothing, always

talked, and it was better to talk all at once than not to utter anything. Yet Dudley, if superior, did not emphasize it; if bored, he did not show it. He watched ringed fingers thrust tentatively between the bars; heard female voices assume a childish babbling tone as though they addressed a baby in its perambulator; listened also to numerous remarks about parrots in general, and about himself in particular that showed abysmal ignorance, yet he betrayed no hint of what he thought about it all. If depressed and weary, he mastered himself and the situation in this happy way—by an impenetrable silence that was not without its grandeur.

Occasionally, without visibly moving his beak, he gabbled to himself, but so low that his "*adnauseamadnauseamadnauseam*" was not audible; and beyond this heavenly gabble he uttered no single sound—nor meant to until the right moment had arrived, and this right moment, it turned out, was the tail of the noisy overcrowded party.

The majority of the guests had left; the rest hovered in the narrow hall over endlessly lingering goodbyes. These, as in his own practice, should have been brief, effective, neat, but this final little group made them verbose, incoherent, silly. A good exit-sentence seemed beyond them, they hovered over mumbled insincerities; the bow-out smile of their hostess, produced at the wrong moment, became a set grimace, so that Dudley, watching the prolonged performance, having already disliked the entire gathering, now posi-

tively felt loathing for its disappearing tail. Would it never end, this wriggling, noisy tail?

With the dignity due to perfect inner and outer poise, he observed the wearisome detail from the middle of his perch, the head cocked a trifle sideways, eyes boldly glittering, alert but undemonstrative. "I," his attitude suggested, "when I've had enough, just withdraw with my little bow and my kindly smile. If I add a word, it is a brief one, plain perhaps, but courteous. And on this, I retire!"

Several of these guests included him in their long farewells, waving a hand, a glove, or tweaking the bars of his cage. He was voted a "fine bird, but uninteresting because he wouldn't perform." A performance, certainly, he had not granted, for like any other artist he was not to be won too easily. Thus, only at the eleventh hour did he grant his favours to the late group in the hall, considering that the right moment had come at last.

He now, therefore, suddenly produced one of his best numbers with startling abruptness, entirely unprovoked, and without a hint of warning. So unexpected was it, indeed, that the women sprang back, taken completely by surprise. One of them screamed, a second stopped her ears and shut her eyes tightly but left her mouth wide open. The others, male and female, gasped and stared. Dudley, as intended, had made a really great impression.

His opening note was a penetrating shriek of such violence that the rubbish and bric-à-brac

hanging on the walls positively rattled. This piercing shriek, rising and falling, was repeated seven times, and immediately following it, but in gentler and more musical tones, came the syllables he loved so dearly:

"Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*!"

There was affection in the voice, there was longing, passion, there was a note of summons, but there was a note of warning, too. Seven times in rapid succession the lordly bird produced this poignant call.

And the owner of the name, having long since left his dizzy edge and now biding his time in a cramped space beneath a plush sofa, heard it, and knew his hour had struck. His friend had not forgotten, much less failed him. It was the psychological moment for his introduction. His uncanny instinct guided him infallibly. If he now showed himself it must be obvious to all that he was the parrot's friend, and as a result he would not be kicked out into the street. On the contrary, he would be welcomed. He decided to act.

Gilderoy, therefore, in all his ginger frightfulness, puffed cheeks, torn ears, sprayed whiskers, flat skull, lean skinny back and unkempt tail—Gilderoy, in his blaze of auburn beauty, his patched eye squinting more than ever—emerged. He came into full view, marched across the hall, neatly picking his way between brown and buckled shoes, leaped soundlessly on to the table where the cage stood and then, to the amazement of everybody, deftly inserted a velvet paw

between the bars within easy reach of the parrot's deadly mandibles.

There was a collective gasp. There was a hush of admiration.

It was the signal for a fresh outburst of human voices. Surprise, laughter, approval and dismay, each had its turn. One lady, subject to cat-phobia, stifled a scream and took her departure instantly, hardly finding breath to say good-bye; a second having already collapsed upon a broken chair, collapsed upon it again; others cried loudly: "A cat! A red cat! There's going to be a fight!" and asked where it came from.

Gilderoy's move, that is, produced exactly the impression he had calculated.

"Why, I do believe they know each other!" cried a discerning artist in a stock collar. "Gilderoy, of course, must be the cat's name. Look at them, will you? Just look at them!"

"Don't touch them! Don't interfere!" exclaimed others. "Just watch!"

For Dudley, faithful comrade that he was, rose gallantly to the occasion. He had known the warning call would reach the cat no matter where he hid, and his friend's trick was plain as day to him. He did not fail that friend now. Ashamed, perhaps, of his ruffianly appearance among these well-dressed folk, he played the game. "Dudley," as he loved to assure himself, "is not a snob."

When the velvet paw, therefore, came toward him through the bars, he gazed down at it with a moment or two of careful contemplation, then

edged delicately along the perch until he reached it, lowered his dangerous beak very slowly, felt the paw with a tiny rubbing motion to and fro, and —tenderly kissed it.

"Good-bye for the present," he then remarked in a quiet version of the Vicar's voice, but so low that no one seemed to hear him. The chorus, besides, drowned all except the most penetrating tones. The entire group applauded, the men drawing attention to the fact that the animals were obviously, if mysteriously, good friends, the women giving birth to expressions of ecstatic adoration that betrayed the maternal instinct lurking even in the dimmest females. During which, Red Gilderoy, dropping smartly from the table, arched his ugly back, stiffened his skinny tail into a ramrod, lifted his patched eye heavenwards and, purring loudly, began to rub himself affectionately to and fro against his hostess's pink silk stockings.

It was an inspired performance, and Dudley watched it with a philosopher's attention and the silence of a saint. Loyal thoroughbred that he was, he did nothing to divert attention from his pal. It was the cat's entrance, his sense of drama alone forbade.

"And where did *you* come from?" asked Mrs. de Mumbles in a friendly voice, for she liked animals. "I've never seen *you* before!" She stopped to stroke his back. "If you two are really friends I shall keep you, too, I suppose!"

No answer came, but Gilderoy increased his attentions, Dudley's self-obliterating silence

deepened. Soon after which, though not soon enough for Mrs. de Mumbles who had to dress for an early theatre-dinner, the group took its final leave, voting the Parrot and Cat tea party an original and delightful entertainment.

Mrs. de Mumbles found herself, relatively speaking, alone; she had half-an-hour to dress for dinner; she found time, none the less, to give orders for the immediate welfare of her new visitor. One by one the " brigands " disappeared into the street, with their pay in cash, and various extras in their pockets . . . and ten minutes later Gilderoy was gorging himself with milk under Mrs. Dibbs' eye in the kitchen, she being partial to cats, while Dudley was crooning to himself in semi-darkness beneath a spotty and odoriferous table-cloth spread over his cage.

Mrs. de Mumbles, meanwhile, was gradually emerging from a larva-state, through a tight chrysalis binding sheath, into the full-blown glory of a dazzling night-moth. Her friends had sent their car. Nearly an hour later she took her departure, her last half-crown in her hand for the chauffeur, and in her mind a diverting story few of that afternoon's guests would have recognised, to explain her " unforgiveable lateness." Her last word had been a direction, foolish but well-meant, for the comfort and welfare of her new visitors.

" Cuckoo! " murmured Dudley and whistled two bars of his hymn.

The apartment fell gradually into a comfortable and soothing silence. Mother and daughter, after

prolonged but fruitless attempts to make " Polly " perform, solaced themselves, first by cursing it as a " stupid beast," and then by eating as many of the sugared cakes and creamy chocolates as they calculated would not be missed. After which, having placed a basket for the " common-looking Tom," they, too, retired, Mrs. Ma Dibbs to her bed, Maria, with bursting pockets, to her policeman father's home in Kilburn, N.W.1.

CHAPTER XI

The Grey Parrot delights to dwell in companies. . . . This instinct for companionship, so strong in all parrots, is especially strong in the Greys.—W. T. GREENE.

Thine is the lore of Ra and Rameses.
GRAHAM TOMSON.

THE stillness deepened. An air of expectancy reigned over the silent flat, its focus in this deserted kitchen. It was the moment the two scoundrels had been waiting for—their first free night away from home.

There was already a change in them, something new, an alteration for the better, an improvement, yes. It must be recognised, it must be acknowledged frankly. London life had affected them, each in his own way; it had intensified their processes. They were geared up, their wits sharpened, the intelligence of both biped and quadruped at its top notch now. This effect of cosmopolitan, of metropolitan, life was distinctly noticeable. The friction with so many other minds, after the monotonous lethargy of country existence, told at once.

If this result showed in the cat by deepening his instinct chiefly, until the mass of feline faculties accumulated through the centuries were in marvellously sharpened working order, it showed, with the parrot, in his predominant characteristic —his mind. Dudley, in fact, found his entire store of experience ready to his claw and beak.

All that life had so carefully stored for nearly a hundred years lay within instant reach. His riches of memory, his remarkable gift of speech, his powers of expression burst into full flower. He found he could draw instantly upon any item that he needed. London acted like a forcing house. He summed up in himself, it seemed, the whole collective wisdom of his race. He became the Super King Parrot. His earliest years in the great forest, his sea-faring days, his long period of study with the intoxicated scholar, his intervals in the library of another house, his quiet *villègiature* with Molly at the Muddlepuddle Manor—all these, respectively, and as occasion required, gave up their dead.

And this brightening of intelligence, this intensification of consciousness due to the effect of London's crowded life upon the pair, must be recognised now once for all, since it explains the greater scope and freedom of the creatures' intercourse with one another. There seemed, henceforth, little, by way of idea and exchange of thought, they could not communicate.

This exchange seemed conveyed largely by the eyes, where humans, watching them, might have noticed nothing but a fixed empty stare. It was not so, however. Dudley and Gilderoy had expressionless, but never vacant eyes. Gesture, attitute and silence played their part as well, wireless whiskers and eloquent tail-feathers, while Dudley freely used his many-tongued voice. But eyes, perhaps, said most.

Thus, the deepening silence now over Mrs. de

Mumbles' kitchen was not an empty silence Gilderoy, slowly uncurling himself from an affectation of innocent sleep, looked cleverly about him. The kitchen lay clean and clear, its utensils glittering in a silvery stream, the rising moon poured through the window above the tradesmen's lift. It was an open window. At his side stood the table with Dudley's cage upon it, shrouded by the spotty cloth. The cat, having taken in every detail at a glance, rose, arched his back, stretched his legs, yawned widely, and began to purr. They were short, sharp, eager purrs, of the kind that usually preceded vigorous action. They were, in fact, an announcement. Gilderoy had a definite end in view. He was about to do something.

The parrot heard these warning purrs, for he, too, was wide awake in his obscure retreat. At the moment, however, he permitted himself no response. He felt a trifle uneasy; he knew that what was coming would leave him out of it, at a disadvantage somehow. He maintained, therefore, that profound silence of which he was past-master, since doing, saying nothing lessened the chances of putting oneself in the wrong. From the occasional pauses in the purring, he guessed that Gilderoy was washing busily, and this washing, he knew, was significant. The cat, he divined, intended action presently of a very decided kind.

As stated, however, the astute and philosophic bird permitted himself no immediate recognition of his friend's preparations; no acknowledgement

escaped him; he would not be precipitate. No hint of his own opinion, much less of his own intentions, broke the silence.

"Never enjoys himself!" reflected the cat on the floor below. "Can't — I suppose." To which again, no reply was forthcoming, since Dudley behind his cloth could not see the shining eye that conveyed the comment, and thus had not received it.

"Work?" came from the floor a few minutes later, half challenge and half sneer. The cat, apparently, wanted a sign of some sort from his pal and used the best method to obtain it. As the whiskers sent the message this time, Dudley caught it. He noted the tone as well. There was a pause.

Any reference to his Work touched curiously deep emotions in the King Parrot's breast. A faint quiver ran along his nerves. The little heart almost missed a beat. He was considering his reply.

"If I can't work *here*," he replied evasively some minutes later, his voice very low, yet admirably controlled, "I can't work——"

He hesitated. Two words occurred to him.

"Nowhere," he concluded, rejecting "anywhere" as less emphatic.

He moved slowly along his perch and pecked a corner of the cloth aside so that he could now see his friend, a bit of the kitchen as well. The moonlight caught his noble head, his beak, and one penetrating eye. Thus partially visible, the coloured cloth about him as a robe, he appeared

both impressive and mysterious. Clothed with wisdom and authority, he looked. For some minutes he gazed down his aristocratic beak at his friend, whose assiduous washing he found increasingly suspicious. And, indeed, Red Gilderoy's attitude just then was not exactly a drawing-room attitude, nor, strictly speaking, was it *comme il faut* even in a kitchen. His position was one possible, perhaps, to felines only, as of the acrobat artist who glances at the world backwards along his own spine. One fore-leg rose straight into the air, while a hind-leg projected at right angles.

Dudley prolonged his inspection.

"I perceive," he stated with cold disapproval presently, "that you have an end in view." He relapsed into silence with his air of "What I have said, I have said."

Uncertain whether the remark was anatomical or psychological, Gilderoy chose the latter. He was out of his depth when Dudley indulged this highbrow mood. His friend was being rude to him somewhere, though he didn't quite know where.

"Umph!" came his brief, contemptuous purr. And he went on washing, not even turning his head. His mind was made up. He had, obviously an end in view. A twitch of the upright leg now informed his friend what this purpose was:

"The tiles to-night—for *me*!" he announced, sitting up suddenly, his green eyes blazing. The tip of his tail twitched fiercely to and fro. He glared into empty space.

An ominous silence followed this ultimatum. Dudley became prey to a critical, a superior mood. Faithful by nature, he felt small sympathy with promiscuous *amours*. His own life was austere, though, as a rude man in the library once reminded him, when a week-end flirtation involved a trip to West Africa, enthusiasm must be high, reflection steady, before starting on the journey. Sex, too, should be definitely ascertained in advance.

"I, for my part," he now observed, "am chaste." It was offered as a statement of indubitable scientific accuracy.

"By what?" asked Gilderoy, without looking up.

"Stet," said Dudley sharply, believing it meant a snub, then slipping into the confused gabble in which it was his aggravating way to say extremely interesting things too softly to be audible. Two words alone emerged clearly towards the end: *habeas corpus*, which he considered even more annihilating than "stet."

He was offended, wounded, disappointed. With so much trouble and effort he had brought his pal to London! And now . . . !

With an air of intense morality about him, he withdrew slowly along his perch till the spotty table-cloth concealed him. But he was of too generous a nature to feel hurt for long. He reflected for some minutes, then forgave. Cats, he told himself, after all is said and done, are cats, and *tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*. There was nothing he did not understand, he remem-

bered. Adventures, for some, are in the blood, though, of course, the finest adventures are those enjoyed——er——" by oneself."

He preened himself a little, comforted, taking a new pose upon his perch. The tail feathers spread out slightly. And Gilderoy, aware of the gist of his friend's reflections, if unable to follow them in detail, noted the altered attitude. He interpreted it with a general accuracy. A thousand stinging replies were open to him, of course, but instead he merely changed the conversation. He was too pre-occupied, perhaps, to be clever at his pal's expense.

" The night is find and dry," he signalled. " My friends expect me." He took a quick lick at an empty saucer. " Here's to Loose Moments," flashed his green eye.

There was a short sharp purr, a thud. He had made his exit through the half-opened window.

" Good-bye for the present," from Dudley, greeted the disappearing tail, followed by a mumbled " *O si sic omnes* and cuckoo bloody hell *ab initio* . . . " and a softly whistled " lead kindly light." He closed his eyes. He sighed. His claws opened and shut. His tail feathers, since there was none to admire them, drew in. He composed himself. He had, of course, his dreams which never failed him.

It was some time, however, before he allowed his dreams to master him. Recent events, the exit of the cat in particular, stirred deep reflections in his breast, as the occasional faint shivering of the smaller feathers betrayed. That reference to his

Work had stirred mysterious emotions that still troubled him profoundly.

What was this "Work" he had to do? What was its nature? Did Molly herself know? It occupied him intensely, but in some remote portion of his being he could not quite reach. He both knew, yet did not know. What could it be . . .?

The wheels of reflection turned and whirred incessantly in his active mind, yet the secret remained hidden from him. Any reference to his loneliness, to his lack of companionship, to his isolation from his kind, to anything racial in a word, seemed to bear upon it. There was something he had to do, to achieve, to consummate, some job of importance to his race, a significant spot of work he owed as a duty to his kind and ought to achieve before he left the earth, or else admit that he lived in vain. When Molly told all and sundry that he had some tremendous Work on hand, she talked more wisely than she knew. Only, what was this WORK exactly?

He approached the matter indirectly now, aware from long experience that a frontal attack had no effect. A gentle yearning crept into his mood. His outlook over the narrow strip of moon-lit kitchen visible to him was tinged with mournfulness, his mood a minor one.

"What I really miss," he told himself, facing the naked truth, "is, perhaps, companionship. I have no pal. Gilderoy," he hastened to add, loyal to him even in his absence, "is all right, of course, but—he's a quadruped, and has no wings."

He paused to nibble at his soft breast feathers a moment.

"In the daytime," he went on presently, "it's all right. *I* am all right, qui' all ri', I mean." He thought over the statement for several minutes, before he passed it. "It's the evenings," he added with emphasis. "In the evenings, I should enjoy someone to talk to, someone who knows ——er——nearly as much as I do——" he gave a subdued little cough, a perfect imitation of the "ahem!" the Muddlepuddle butler used when he was about to prevaricate—"to someone, at any rate," his tone more wistful now, "who has heard—as much as I have heard. My evenings, I admit, are lonely."

The low voice trembled.

"Gilderoy," he went on softly, "has his own pals—everywhere, but I," and his voice shook, "I am an exile. I dwell alone."

To divert attention from himself, he suddenly clasped his beak, one eye peeping downwards between his claws. But the rising emotion would not be denied.

"No one invites me—never," he ended with a gulping sob that shook his little figure from head to foot, "I never have a party—ever!"

The broken voice, the modulations of self-pity, the appeal for sympathy, above all the sob, were given, strange to say, in a distinctly female tone; they were, in fact, a perfect imitation of sounds produced in the country by Her Ladyship sometimes when Colonel Sir Arthur, forgetting Dudley's presence, thought himself alone with her. It was

natural, therefore, that as a means of controlling his emotion, he now added in a gruff male voice: "Cut it out, my dear! For God's sake cut it out! Sob-stuff doesn't work with me! Cut it out, I say! Last week you were out six nights in the seven!"

Upon which the consistent bird immediately obeyed his own injunction, turning his attention to other matters. He pecked aside the spotty cloth that shut off his world. The moonlight, he saw, had climbed much higher up the wall. The china, pots and pans now glistened on the shelves. He noted tea-pots hanging by the handles; huge soup-tureens, countless jugs and cups. From inspecting these his eye wandered back to nearer home. He fell to considering his more immediate surroundings with close attention—the interior of his somewhat bleak and dreary cage. Its severity he approved, it matched the ascetic sternness of his nature, of his present life, at any rate.

"My home," he told himself, "is simple, because I prefer it so." He indulged in a very light guffaw. "I have reduced life to its simplest terms," he conveyed by a cock of the head, a turn of the sleek neck. "I need essentials only."

He thought profoundly for some moments.

"To do without," he then pronounced, "is the secret of a happy life. Dudley, my bird," he added, after another passing guffaw, "what you can do without is added to you. And that's why I have everything," he chuckled, "*per contra carpe diem* blast yer gizzard dam."

His roaming eyes glanced about him at the meagre kitchen furniture, while thought wandered reminiscently to other days and other scenes. His long past presented a series of every sort and kind of home. He reviewed them swiftly, shaking his head gently as he did so. Every degree of comfort and discomfort had been his. He had stayed—who more?—in the houses of the great, the connoisseurs, the "tastey," and had experienced that priceless furniture which, being useless, was also comfortless. He had known ancient drawers that would not open, precious chairs intended to be worshipped but not sat in, Period tables and secretaires that shook and rattled when writers, their legs spread-eagled of necessity, tried to use them, and an assortment of antique "lovelies" that adorned the room, yet added teasingly to the nervous discomfort of its occupant. Hours, days, weeks he had spent in chambers that were museums merely, inducing an attitude of prayer rather than a state of soothing hospitality. Vulgar, pretentious, he considered this sacrifice of a living-room to a collector's vanity.

A faint snort passed his tiny delicate nostrils as he thought of it. Having beauty in himself, he, for one, did not need its excessive externalisation. Honest stuff he approved, but it must be solid, useful, practical, above all, comfortable.

He glanced round with a shiver of refined appreciation at the floor, the perch, the shining bars, the little gate. His eye caught the seed-pan with approval. It was one he could easily and comfortably get his beak into—useful, in good

taste. "Genuine stuff!" he commented, and climbed down and took a snack. He took a sip of water, too.

"Nice," he approved in a tiny voice, passing his club-shaped tongue round the cavities of his big, hollow beak, as memory brought a passing picture of her ladyship's maid for a moment, the smart young woman who offered him chocolates sometimes. "Yes, naice, distinctly naice."

Having dealt thus with his immediate surroundings, explaining them adequately to himself, he crawled back to the centre of his perch again, and turned his attention to other matters altogether. He closed his eyes. . .

The hours passed. The flat became lapped in deeper and ever-deeper silence. The moonlight drew its pool of silver higher and higher up the wall. The patched linoleum floor now lay in shadow.

While Mrs. de Mumbles, at some gay supper table, led her effervescent chatter in the direction of health, disease, smart life and being in the swim, survival of the soul, dressmakers, and eternity, Dudley, marvellous, mysterious Grey King Parrot, dealt firmly and practically with time.

He fell, that is to say, into a sound deep sleep.

Balanced on his perch as few bipeds know how to balance, his head lay down his spine, in a position few bipeds could achieve. His delicate, slim body was erect, yet every muscle in it relaxed

and resting. He dominated his surroundings with magisterial and consummate ease, a masterpiece that no one, alas, was present to admire.

As ever, therefore, even in deep slumber, he admired himself.

CHAPTER XII

The cat is not a commonplace creature when it loves.—FEE.

He stood, an ebon crescent, flouting that ivory moon,
Then raised the pibroch of his race, the Song without a Tune.

THE hours slipped away, while moonlight and silence reigned supreme. Under their magic influence even the pokey kitchen took on an air of some oriental palace. The cage itself, whose spotty cloth almost assumed the faded wonder of old tapestry, borrowed the semblance of a kiosque, a domed retreat of peace some Eastern potentate had built for contemplation or for secret pleasure. Moonlight, that transmutes dross into precious metal, transmuted Mrs. de Mumbles' kitchen in this way. The cage and its contents were certainly transfigured. They wore an atmosphere of dream and fantasy.

This atmosphere affected, naturally, the happy sleep of the sensitive and gifted bird. He dreamed of far blue seas, of silvery foam upon a shore of golden sand; of azure skies, of sparkling, care-free flights from tree to tree. Above him the vast slope of myriad green branches swept to heaven; below him in great conches, mother-of-pearl and opal, he caught the music of the sea's great liberty, the joy of playing fish that leaped to taste the sunshine, then splashed again. This sweetness of life, the wonder of it, this wondrous, gay, careless sense

of liberty, poured through him like an electric flood. He heard the leagues of forest rustling; he dreamed of song, of laughter, of little beaks that opened wide for food, of warm soft feathers pressed tenderly against his own breast, of nesting time, of eggs. . .

Then, gradually, into his happy dream, another ingredient came creeping, imperceptibly at first and unawares, darkening its glory, but presently with more definite effect. The bird's golden fantasy grew troubled, insecure; there fell, as it were, a shadow on that brilliant landscape. The sea turned sombre, the stainless sky took on a hint of cloud. And the sleeping parrot perceived this change by means of his supreme gift of hearing. The disturbing new ingredient was sound. It stole upon him, apparently, from the deep undergrowth of enormous forest, or was it perhaps from even further away than that? It was neither a pleasant nor a soothing sound, although it held a kind of wild, harsh rhythm some might possibly have called musical.

Long past midnight it was when these bursts of primitive, half-savage music entered the kitchen with the moonlight and troubled Dudley's dreams. He stirred in his sleep; he woke; not gradually and in spots as human beings wake—the whole of him passed from the unconscious to the conscious with a single rush. He was instantly awake all over, every nerve alert, every muscle taut, every sense and faculty at the acme of their effectiveness in a single second.

Above all, withdrawing his head from his spine so that he now faced the world, he—listened.

The raucous, half-savage music came through the window from the world of roofs outside. From the desert of tiles this primitive jangle pierced the still night and banged his happy peace away. He heard singing, challenge, battle-cries; there were love-notes, too, abandoned, in poor taste, Dudley thought, without modesty or restraint. Saturnalia, he realized, were in progress, high above the sleeping world. On the dewy tiles, in the shadow of portentous yet protective chimneys, an orgy ran its course beneath the great shocked moon.

Listening, he shivered slightly. Plucked straight from his sweetly fantasy of Liberty, this license, as he felt it, jarred him. For, high above the general chorus, he now heard Gilderoy's voice, his singing voice, than which Dudley knew no more horrible sound in all his vast experience of life. Worse yet, it was the cat's erotic singing voice. Red Gilderoy, bolshevik of most abandoned type, when he cast restraint aside, was singing a love-song to some shadowy mate.

The grey parrot with the red tail listened with his greatest concentration. His reactions at first were confused, his feelings thrown into considerable disorder; and a second shudder, more pronounced than the first, ran down his

perfect little body. Nothing proclaimed more plainly how deeply he was stirred than the fact that, physically as well as mentally, his balance was affected. He wobbled, saving himself only by a deft movement in the nick of time. He broke into audible and rapid speech, the utterance both troubled and indifferently spaced:

"Gotohellcutitout! Doctoranyhope? Goodmorningdudley*nildesperandum*gilder-*roy*! Cutitoutcuckooitdoesn'tworkwithmeblastyoududley!" he gabbled with tremendous speed, using a mixture of tones and voices, both male and female.

This confusion, however, lasted for a moment only, and he was speedily master of himself again, the recovered self-control showing itself by silence and immobility. Clasping his iron beak with one claw, he gazed steadily at the strip of moonlight which filtered through the worn cloth over his cage. He was seen at his most effective thus. There stole over his dim outline an appearance that magnified him, something of infinity, something inscrutable and magnificent, without beginning and without end, yet something so perfectly proportioned that it was suggestive beyond all possible words. Had Rodin seen him at this moment a finer, if a different, *chef d'oeuvre* would have enriched the world.

Stirred to the depths, the parrot's mind was working. He was thinking—creatively. . .

The wisdom of this self-effacing King Grey Parrot from the Pico de Papagio was nowhere more apparent, perhaps, than in his frank recogni-

tion of what he conceived to be certain fundamental facts of life. These were based, of course, upon his study of the race which had adopted him. He, thus, recognised two human faculties to which no limit could be set: credulity and the power of self-deception. People believed what they wanted to believe. Nor did he make that common mistake, due to lack of humour, of excluding himself; he applied his dictum to himself, as well as to Gilderoy. Believing he was of irresistable beauty, he understood that Gilderoy thought similarly. The cat, he meant by this, found Dudley beautiful.

Another fundamental fact experience had taught him was that no friendship is always and entirely secure. This seemed particularly applicable to the present moment. No friendship in the *whole* world, as he now considered the point more closely, is *permanently* secure.

Life being a process of evolution, all forms as yet imperfect, there is a point where resistance is overcome, where even the noblest traits break down. The honest will steal, the honourable betray, the personal confidante—the pronoun was his own—disgorge her horde of private, trustfully-given intimacies, the virtuous indulge. A stronger emotion must always overcome a weaker one, as the seasick, informed that the ship is about to sink, forget their nausea before the more powerful attack of fear.

Even gentle-men, Dudley was aware, before the assault of prolonged hunger, had been known to devour their own kind with appetite and relish.

From his tree-top in earlier days he had looked down upon a feast or two. He knew.

Trust in a pal, therefore, which accepts blindly—swallows—everything at face value, he considered naive, and upon this fundamental weakness the parrot now turned the full powers of his mind. The flowering of this mind, the stores of memory easily accessible, have already been referred to. He was very practical about it. If his love for Red Gilderoy was steady, his trust, on the other hand, was qualified by the limits his wisdom set to it. There were moments when the fire in the cat's eyes became neither more nor less than a red lamp of warning, since it announced the birth of an emotion so fundamental as to be threatening, possibly overmastering. All other traits, even the noblest, might yield to its assault. If friendship is built upon moral qualities, appetite remains ever instinctive and all-devouring.

In that "all" and "devouring" Dudley perceived, he himself might easily be included. Appetite, though its reign were brief, would provide no leisure for reflection afterwards. So far as *he* was concerned, it would be too late.

Listening now to his pal's discordant love-songs on the tiles, he recognized the noise as instinctive and elemental. The red lamps, he knew, were well alight in Gilderoy's bloodshot eyes. The sweet yearning for union, for companionship, which had lately throbbed in his own little breast quickly waned before the assault of a stronger and more sinister feeling. No union, he realized, could be more complete than that between the

eater and his meal. The cat and the swallowed—er—mouse, have become absolutely one.

To put it bluntly, Dudley felt scared. This union-business was unpleasant. And his faculties, now working at top-notch, his sense of coincidence helping, revived a memory opportunely—a sallow faced French governess reading poetry aloud to herself when he was "asleep" in his cage. It was doubtless her tone of voice, rather than a full understanding of the actual words, that made him remember it:

> Nuzzing in zis world is single,
> All zings, by a law divine,
> In anozzer's being mingle;
> Wy not I wiz zine?

And it was the last line he now crooned over and over to himself, as one who whistles to keep his courage up, as he listened to Gilderoy and visualized his sharp teeth and gleaming eyes beneath the moon outside.

Hearing the half-savage orgy, he was glad that he sat inside his cage, secure from any tactile attention on the part of his otherwise trusted friend. What there might be to eat upon the tiles, the bird could not know. Gilderoy might, of course, have satisfied himself already with something, and return his own attractive self again. The parrot took no chances. He now edged sideways along his perch, taking up a position as far removed as possible from all the bars at once. Before settling down, however, he rubbed his formidable mandibles to and fro against the

metal rods, sharpening and polishing his beak. His mind worked brilliantly, furiously. Nothing, alas, he discovered, can be larger than its own container. The cage, he considered, was a trifle small. Planted firmly in the geometrical centre, and as far removed from the outside world as possible, he waited. He mastered a slight inner trembling, so that it remained inside. "*Tempusedaxrerum coeterisparibus*," he whispered, "and the more I can look like a *very* hard stone, the better." He did so.

How long he stood thus is difficult to say, but that it was half an hour at least seems certain from the subsequent position of the moon. A faint sound first disturbed his reverie, even before the huge shadow fell upon the cage. The parrot was alert and ready, therefore, for anything that might happen. He perceived instantly that a moving outline cast this shadow; it was a living shape; and this living, moving shape stood on the window-ledge, silhouetted against the moon, now sunk well towards the horizon of the roofs. The outline was thus magnified.

"That's Gilderoy," decided the observant bird.

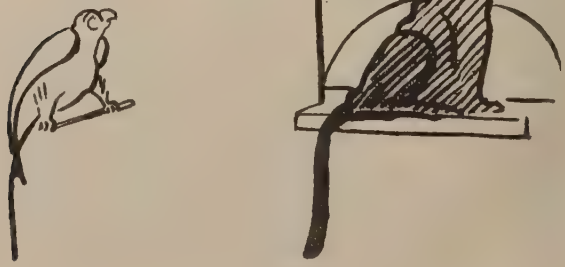
He did not move; he kept stone-still upon his perch; his head was cocked at an angle, which enabled both eyes, instead of merely one, to watch the situation. The cat, he noticed, was engaged in an occupation he particularly disliked. He was licking his chops. He looked, against the sky, enormous, and Dudley wished passionately that he himself were bigger. Yet

even diminutive size, he remembered, if perfectly proportioned, may be as impressive as the bulk of mountains. And this comforted him a little. He shifted one claw a fraction of an inch.

Gilderoy instantly noticed the movement and looked up sharply. He stopped licking his chops. He stared fixedly. But if Dudley believed himself prepared for anything that might happen, he was not prepared for what then did happen. He was the first to admit it. None of his accumulated wisdom afforded a word of guidance in such an eventuality.

Gilderoy, perched on the window-sill, began to sing.

Lifting his flat-topped head so that it was silhoutted against the lovely moon, the torn ear more noticeably torn than before, the whiskers, so to speak, all over the place, he opened his mouth to its full extent, flung back neck and shoulders, and yowled his song into the night, but distinctly *at* the parrot:



Oh, sexless bird,
When you're interred,
The world will lose
A great recluse !

O saintly life
That knows no wife,
No pretty leg,
Nor e'en an egg !

Chaste and aloof,
You scorn all proof
How, where, or when,
Or cock—or hen !

During this hideous caterwauling, which Dudley rendered into words in so masterly a fashion, one thing was particularly noticeable—that the parrot, namely, at once memorized the sound, adding a new number to his *repertoire*. That he could have translated the dismal wail into purest poetry, while simultaneously committing the actual row to memory, proved that his faculties were functioning at their very highest. The forcing-house of London life proved, indeed, remarkable. His rendering, moreover, was inspirational and obviously from the heart, not merely free verse which is prose cut up into lines of unequal length without music or rhythm. The words, being of course his own, he accepted as complimentary, their challenge as praise, their insults as playful flattery. Was the sublime bird, perhaps, laughing at himself a little? The loving on the tiles had stirred him to the depths where

his mysterious secret lay. Besides the sneer, there was pathos, passion, poignancy in the wailing song, and the language was indubitably his own.

Instinct and reason, which rarely appear together, being mutually self-destructive, now worked in combination in him, and at their highest. His face, as he listened, wore a rapt expression. He trembled. First one section of feathers shivered, then another, as catspaws of wind ruffle a lake's smooth surface in different spots. His claws opened and shut, sure sign of ecstasy. And at the end of the song he spoke, using inaudible tones he did not mean Gilderoy to hear.

What he said, however, was drowned by the noise of an attic window opening somewhere on the roof, by loud curses in an angry male voice

and by the clatter of objects hurled violently in the direction of the singer. Three lumps of coal, a child's sandshoe, a chisel and a broken hair brush fell in a rattling shower on the tiles. And Dudley knew the number was ended because, though Gilderoy did not stir an inch, he twitched his ears and did not resume his song.

The shower of objects having likewise ceased, the parrot repeated his interrupted remarks:

"Gratis," he murmured, "satis," adding, as though uncertain which was best, "stet stet stet Dudleydudleydudley jamsatisgratis."

Gilderoy's ears twitched, proving that he caught the murmur, but he did not move, and Dudley's instinct warned him that he was still a bit above himself. Though his attitude on the window-sill suggested a certain weariness, the beast was still emotionally over-wrought, and therefore dangerous. The parrot observed a hint of insolence about the tail he could not approve. He decided to say something else but louder this time. He used Latin when a fuss threatened, or when he felt frightened. When the scholar used Latin, he remembered, the people he used it on rarely did anything aggressive. It made them quiet rather:

"*De mortuis*," he now offered in a kindly, audible voice, "*nonsequitur bona fides locus standi* Dudleydudley Gilder-*roy*."

At the sound of his own name, the cat slowly turned his head towards the cage, stared fixedly a moment, then fell abruptly to licking his chops again.

There came a pause of several minutes.

"Tired a bit, physically," thought Dudley, with relief. "Can't come in," he said presently aloud. "I'm dressing errata stetstetstet——"

He stopped in the middle, because Gilderoy likewise stopped that horrid licking of his chops. The parrot, cautious and intensely watchful, waited for the next action, which came almost at once. Gilderoy dropped suddenly from the window-sill and leaped soundlessly upon the table beside the cage. The two movements were so rapid that they seemed a single one. From where he sat, the spotty covering intervened, but though Dudley could not actually be seen, he knew that the cat was staring fixedly, peering at him closely through the semi-transparent cloth. The brilliant green eyes were appraising him. And the parrot was glad that he had recently altered his own position, yet sorry that he could not improve it still further. Being in the geometrical centre of the cage, this was impossible. He therefore contented himself with the next best what he believed was known as *rigor mortis* or *rigor de mortuis*. Whispering this under his breath, he assumed a rigid immobility, at the same time looking as old, as tough, as unappetising as his beauty would allow. His eyes seemed of glass, set in a form of stone no planetary teeth could possibly chew. Though he kept his back to the cat, he was ready for instant action.

It was at this very second that a stroke of luck came the parrot's way. He caught a whiff of fish, actually, he believed, of herring. Gilderoy,

evidently, had found a dust-bin or an open attic window. The cat had eaten!

This emboldened the bird a trifle, so that he dared to move his neck, which was getting a little stiff. He at once also took on a less repellent air, preening a tiny bit, and looking less like stone. He found his courage, he found his voice as well. In order to convey what he had to say, he edged a shade round the cloth and showed himself, and he chose a sentence he had heard a thousand times and one that never failed to induce gentleness in his friend.

"Saucerofmilk! Saucerofmilk! Milkforgilderoy!" he mentioned. It was a question, more than a statement. "Hungry?" was what he really wanted to ask, but this was as near as he cared to get to it.

It worked like magic. With a short, sharp purr of pleasure, Gilderoy dropped to the floor, found the saucer placed long ago by Mrs. Dibbs, stuck his muzzle into it and fell to lapping audibly. Hearing this, and watching the performance, one of the things the cat did delicately and neatly, Dudley advanced a trifle further into view. A sigh of relief escaped him audibly. He felt a little stronger now. His nervousness had passed. It came to him, indeed, that his pal had meant no evil, thought none, that, after all, he had merely been enjoying himself upon the tiles as any other cat might have done. That kind of orgy was natural to him. He had not once thought of eating——er——any bird at all. Dudley, feeling a trifle ashamed of himself, edged further along

his perch, showing more of himself beyond the cloth. He would allow the cat a full view of his beauty.

"Perhaps I wronged the beast after all," ran through his generous mind, "though he did try make a nonsense of me, rather!"

"Good morning! Good morning!" he said pleasantly in Nannie's voice. "Have you washed behind the ears?"

The tone was conciliatory and friendly. The cat, having finished his milk to the last drop, shook his whiskers rapidly, passed a paw over his muzzle, and sprang up again beside the cage. He sat down comfortably and stared full-eyed at his friend. The next moment he lifted a front paw and shoved it just inside the bars.

"Thankmybloodystars! Fed up to the back teeth," produced Dudley in a sailor's voice, as cocking his head, he gazed down at the paw now without a sign of alarm. He moved over a few steps, lowered his beak, and rubbed it against the velvet, then withdrew again to the centre of his perch, while Gilderoy left his paw lying where it was for a full minute longer. Then he, too, withdrew, dropping soundlessly to the floor again.

A difference in the psychology of the pair of ragamuffins betrayed itself here. If Dudley's spirits rose when he was praised and admired, those of the cat remained unaffected by any compliments. To all such cozenings and sweetness, as to anything in the nature of congratulations, he was entirely indifferent. It was mere

boredom, icy boredom, that made him stiffen his tail in the air, smile, purr, and strut to and fro, rubbing his sides against anything that offered, when humans adored him in affected voices. Since he liked being scratched on the throat and under the ears, or having his back stroked, he gave humans the signs that induced them to continue. When he wanted anything from them, he knew the signs he must produce in order to obtain it. He used the race, made use of it. If Dudley accepted praise with pleasure because it was, of course, his due, Gilderoy accepted it because he had an end in view. With the parrot a heart was touched and warmed; with the cat an appetite was tittilated.

He had stuck his paw between the bars, because he liked the tickling of the hard mandibles against its underside.

He now stood in the centre of the linoleum floor, half way between his basket and the door. He paused for some seconds, then sniffed, puffed out his frightful cheeks, cocked his patched eye towards the passage, and flashed a message to his pal:

"Someone's on the stairs! It's the Frump!"

Dudley, having heard her key rattling in the street door some minutes

before, allowed himself a smile of inward superiority —inward merely, because a parrot's face is not allowed by nature to show a smile outwardly. He made no reply. He snuggled his head down into the soft feathers on his back. Gilderoy, strutting delicately as though the linoleum were red-hot, entered his basket and curled up in a ball. When Mrs. de Mumbles peeped cautiously into the kitchen a few minutes later, both her visitors were, apparently, fast asleep. It was, according to the clock, just after three in the morning.

The Frump, as Gilderoy's manner plainly labelled her, did not however follow her guests' example and sleep at once. She lay in bed, thinking of her debts, her brigand servants, and of one or two new acquaintances she had made that evening, who must be invited to her next Tea Party. With her Library beside her, she lay making her little plans. She did not open the Christian Science Bible, nor consult the Telephone Book and Peerage on her counterpane, but reached out presently for her bag. She wished to make sure that the names, addresses and telephone numbers of her new friends had been correctly jotted down. The capacious receptacle of what she most valued on earth was, as ever, ready to her hand, but the fumbling among its Woolworth assortment of goods could not produce the item she wanted. Instead, after a frenzied search, she drew out another item—a half-sheet on which was scrawled a copy of an advertisement some kind friend had helped her to compose. She read it over with approval.

It has already been posted. It would appear to-morrow—or rather, this—morning. It did.

FOUND: Red-tailed grey parrot. Name apparently Gilderoy. Mixed language, whistles hymn tune. Owner please apply, etc.

In a neighbouring column of the same newspaper appeared a second advertisement, as follows:

LOST: Grey King Parrot with red tail. Name Dudley. Very handsome. Refined vocabulary. Whistles "Lead Kindly Light." Talks Latin. Finder please communicate. Expense refunded. Muddlepuddle, etc.

CHAPTER XIII

One variety especially, called the King Grey Parrot by dealers, having red feathers combined with the grey, is stated by them to make the best talker of all.

W. T. GREENE.

WAKING early next morning, but not so early that Gilderoy had not already improved the shining hour by disappearing, Dudley enjoyed himself with a little soliloquy. He had slept well; the kitchen was warm; his cage was supplied with seed, water, and a bit of hard wood —end of a broken umbrella—for him to bite. He felt good.

Chosen at random from his immense *repertoire*, the soliloquy was Language, but the bird's gift of making even the vilest words sound beautiful has already been referred to. *He* thought what he was saying lovely, lovely, and the entrance of Mrs. Dibbs midway through the performance, he accepted as a tribute. It was sheer admiration, she could not stay away. Her attitude, indeed, proved this, for she listened with avidity, chuckled, smiled, then held her sides till her bulky figure shook all over.

"Get on with it, my Luffeley," she chuckled, bending her tousled head to listen better. "It sounds like 'ome to me. You'd buck a corpse up, you would!"

The language did not frighten her as it had

frightened the taxi-driver. She sat down to enjoy it in greater comfort.

Whereupon Dudley promptly stopped, turning one frigid eye upon her with such fixed malevolence that she grew uncomfortable and presently resumed her preparation of the early cup of tea, first for herself and then, some twenty minutes later, for her mistress.

"The milk 'adn't come, Mum," she excused the delay in the bedroom down the passage, "and that bird's languidge is somethin' 'orrible, and not fit for a married woman to 'ear." To which there was no reply, her mistress being too sleepy or too lazy to take it in. Mrs. de Mumbles, anyhow, had awakened, it seemed, in a far from happy mood. Her nerves must have been on edge, for presently Dudley was the unwilling spectator of a scene. Some fifteen minutes later it began, a quarter of an hour the parrot had passed in motionless silence, deaf and irresponsive to Mrs. Dibbs' oft-repeated: "Speak up, birdie! Give us a bit of chat! Let 'er go, my Luffeley, and don't mind *me*!"

Mrs. de Mumbles was heard shouting for her morning paper, screaming, in fact: "Hasn't it *come* yet? Why *don't* they bring it? I shall change the shop. This irregular service is atrocious. What a *flat*! What a *street*! What a *servant*!"

"It's on your bed-table, mum, with your letters," Mrs. Dibbs informed her in a lifeless tone.

"Then why couldn't you tell me so?" asked the

irascible voice. "How am I to know unless you you tell me?"

"Yes, mum. I put it there with the tea."

"It was late, anyhow," asserted the other, as loud as ever.

"The milk come late, mum. The piper was earlier than usual."

"Give it me, please," said Mrs. de Mumbles crossly, and began to search through the advertisements, when the telephone rang, and she plunged headlong, even at this early hour, into a world of receivers, exchanges, supervisors, numerals, b's for butter, p's for peacocks, hulloas, can you hear me, wrong number, you've cut me off, and various other material that Dudley felt could be somehow described *obiter dicta.*

He did not utter the phrase, however, but kept it to himself. For about an hour, indeed, he kept everything to himself, and sat very quiet, thinking about Molly, the Vicar, Hawley the butler, the French governess, and others far away at Muddlepuddle Manor House. It was this train of thought that led him to another country-home memory, so that "Lead Kindly Light" became audible in a whistle, so dulcet that his hostess, finding herself in the passage at that moment, came in to listen.

"At 'is luffely hymn, mum," explained Mrs. Dibbs.

"I can hear," was the rather sharp reply.

They stood listening, but a moment only, and it was Dudley himself who precipitated the "scene." He was pleased to see his hostess

whom he loved, while he resented being explained by the other woman whom he loathed. She reminded him suddenly of the sea, and he changed his Number abruptly to one from his ocean days. He did this without warning, slipping from canticle into cursing.

It was evident he was guilty of a slight mistake here. He made the change too quickly, perhaps. Humans, he forgot at the moment, are apt to be slow in the up-take, and nine out of ten habitually say "What?" to almost every remark. Mrs. de Mumbles, at any rate, carrying her newspaper, clapped it before her face, as though by not seeing the bird she need not hear it either.

"Refined vocabulary, indeed!" she cried, visibly shocked by the appalling language. "But it's awful—terrible!" She stopped her ears, realizing that the newspaper in front of her face could not prevent her hearing. "It's the vile servants who taught him that," she thought. "Disgusting people! *All* servants are vile and disgusting! Don't I know it . . . thieves . . . foul language . . . liars . . . !

Only instead of thinking this to herself, as she imagined, she said it aloud, looking straight at

Mrs. Dibbs as she did so. Her own ears being stopped, she persuaded herself that her audience likewise heard nothing. And Mrs. Dibbs, taking the remarks as personal, immediately replied. Both women talked at once, while Dudley listened, picking up what he could, and interjecting occasional observations as they occurred to him. He loved a good loud noise. He raised his own voice to meet it. He yelled "splendidemendax" and "deusexmachina," bawled "anyhopedocter," followed by his own name and Gilderoy's, but without drawing any special attention to himself. The other talkers were too interested in their own remarks it seemed, to listen to him, even when he screamed his loudest.

From the cook he gathered a few sounds he rather liked and could easily copy if he wished: "isn't right nor fair," he caught, "if one cared to tike it so a hinsult I ain't accustomed to," and "like me wiges at once, thus very di," with "ain't treating me proper" repeated many times.

"You may pack up your things and go this very morning," Mrs. de Mumbles' voice rose very distinctly. "Your things, please, this time —not mine."

"Your things," repeated Dudley, in a rasping tone, "not mine," for he liked the sound of the sentence.

Mrs. Dibbs became infuriated. "Are you haccusing me," she shouted, "of anything, per'aps?"

What then followed was too confusing even for

the parrot's marvellously acute hearing. Both voices shouted at once without an instant's pause. From his hostess, he selected "search warrant and Scotland Yard . . . Commissioner a friend of mine," and from Mrs. Dibbs he chose "slander . . . damages . . . slander . . . damages . . . I know my rights . . . " but if he made a note of these, he soon decided, since the pair made more noise than himself, that he would withdraw. The affair had become boring. He retired into his thoughts . . . from which, some half-an-hour later, he emerged to find quite another atmosphere about him and his cage. The voices were subdued, sugary almost. "We'll say no more about it," he heard, and "'arf-a-crown a week, mum, if you put it that wy'll be all right," and then "you can bring me my hot water now, Mrs. Dibbs," from his hostess as the couple finally separated.

Mrs. de Mumbles evidently emerged from the battle half-a-crown down.

"And when the messenger boy comes," cried the lady in the passage, "there's a telegram for him to take. It's about the parrot. Don't forget it."

"I'll see that I get it too, wot's more," Mrs. Dibbs observed to herself when she was alone again, and it was not the water she referred to.

"Ma! Ma! Your things, not mine! Your things, not mine, please!" exclaimed Dudley, copying his hostess's voice perfectly, while the can was filling. He stared out of the window.

"'old yer jaw!" muttered the cook, going out

with the can. "I won't 'arf throttle yer, I won't."

"Arfacrown! Arfacrown! Slanderdamages! Your things not mine! Ma! Ma!" followed her down the passage.

Thus, the morning in London town began to pass pleasantly enough, and though Dudley missed his friend, he took what fate offered. He observed and listened. To the various callers he paid little attention beyond noting them, and few of these, in any case, penetrated further than the door, which was kept on a chain. Only messenger boys were admitted inside—diminutive creatures who sat waiting patiently in the dark corridor, whispering remarks to Dudley in the hope that he would talk, then trying to understand Mrs. de Mumbles' confusing instructions through the bedroom door. With expressionless faces and wide-open eyes, with "yes, mum" "no, mum" in piping voices, the mites shot away, invariably saying "Good-bye, Polly" to Dudley as they passed the kitchen. He never replied audibly, but merely cocked his head, staring with uninterested eye. The other callers, he was glad to note, were not admitted. There were gruff-voiced men insisting upon money, still sterner men with blue papers they desired to serve personally, lads with parcels demanding cash payment, a foreigner who came by appointment to value pictures, silver, clothes, a telephone *employé* to mend the box, and another who wished to remove the pennies that filled it to bursting.

To these callers Mrs. Dibbs offered comments

according to their kind, comments she knew were effective, since she produced them with such easy, glib conviction: Mrs. de Mumbles was ill, she was dying, she was out, she was in the country, she was abroad, or—in extreme cases only—she was "'aving a fit," a "little fit of sorts and the doctor's with 'er." The visitor was asked to call again—to-morrow, next week, when she had recovered, or "it's best to write."

Besides the messenger boys, only one other caller was admitted, though after careful scrutiny —a friend in difficulties, a woman who not only penetrated to the bedroom for a lengthy talk, but left it later with a fur coat and a silver teapot which Mrs. de Mumbles had intended selling that very day for her own pressing needs. The friend, however, came first, for Mrs. de Mumbles had a large and kindly heart.

Dudley's other faculties, all this time, of course, had not been idle; he not only observed and listened, he reflected, too. He knew, for instance, quite well what a telegram meant. That a telegram had been sent to Muddlepuddle had not escaped him. That an answer might come, he guessed. It did come. About noon, during a little siesta he was taking, he heard his hostess read it aloud to someone in her room, the masseuse, in fact, who evidently detested birds:

"Many thanks for wire sending our butler Hawley to-morrow to identify."

"You'll be well rid of it, Madam," commented the other voice. "They're noisy, treacherous things—with a poisonous nip too——"

"But he likes me—this one," came the decided reply. "He's lively and very handsome. I'd keep him if I could."

"Oh, a he, is it, Madam? Ah! They're better,I believe."

"If a man called Hawley comes," Mrs. de Mumbles shouted instructions to Mrs. Dibbs, "you can let him in. He's the butler where the bird belongs to."

Having listened thus far, Dudley then turned his head and attention in another direction—to the window-sill, where Gilderoy now suddenly appeared.

"Miaow! Miaow!" produced the cat, and jumping down walked over to the saucer of milk that the cook had left for him, while the parrot watched him steadily with one eye that showed disapproval. It was greed, not friendship, that had brought him back. He was, besides being a most inconsiderate guest, dirty and dishevelled, Dudley noted, as he lapped his saucer dry. There was a new notch in his ear, a tuft of matted hair on the top of his flat skull had blood on it, the paws, as he drank, kept their claws out a little. His appearance, in fact, was dreadful.

But Dudley, noting all this, loved him just the same, for he saw behind externals and knew the cat felt similarly towards himself. He was a faithful pal for all his odd behaviour. It was

against his nature to be direct, and all he did was slantwise.

"Ahem!" Dudley opened the conversation audibly. "Cuckoo, Gildy!"

The cat shot a swift glance upwards. His friend, he perceived, had something important to communicate. He finished his milk first, however, then, licking a drop from his whiskers, he sat up and stared.

A violent conversation followed between the two ragamuffiins, although a silent one. Feathers, whiskers, tails, claws, and pose of heads and shoulders conveyed the details. Part of the time the parrot turned his back and gazed out of the window, and Gilderoy, even when most attentive, washed himself. He seemed indifference personified. "I was a sacred animal," his attitude proclaimed, "before even the Ibis or the Hawk were heard of! I may listen, but I need not show that I am interested!"

Dudley, accustomed to his friend's little ways, said what he had to say with dignity. A telegram had been sent to Muddlepuddle Manor House, and an answer had been received, Hawley was coming here to "take me back." He emphatically did not say "home," nor use the personal pronoun in the plural. "Take me back," was what he stated.

Having expressed himself fully, he then closed his eyes as a sign that he had finished. He had given the warning, indicating also that he did not wish to be taken away, and that it was up to Gilderoy to help. To the flow of vehement

comments the cat then offered, he paid no attention whatever, though he made sure that he heard them. Gilderoy was annoyed, and showed it by saying rude things about his friend's sex, about having brought him to town was enough without having to rescue him from the ignominy of recapture, and about many other things besides.

"It keeps warm still," Dudley changed the conversation after fifteen minutes or more. "On the whole," he added pleasantly.

"I'm sweating," agreed Gilderoy.

Dudley, detesting coarse language, assumed an air of heavy consideration.

"Somewhere," he gabbled softly, "there's a true home for each of us, I suppose."

Gilderoy, by rubbing against the skirts of Mrs. Dibbs who had just entered, conveyed that he was independent of any home, and that where he found himself at a given moment was home enough for him. But Dudley, having explained the situation and given his warning, spoke of other matters.

"*A bas les Boches!* Goodbye for the present! Ma! Your things not mine!" he shrieked at the hated Mrs. Dibbs, and caught the outline of his pal as he shot out again to explore the tiles. He broke into a loud guffaw. "Ma! Ma!" he roared again.

CHAPTER XIV

There is no answer to most questions about the cat. She has kept herself wrapped in mystery for some 3,000 *years, and there's no use trying to solve her now.*
VIRGINIA RODERICK, in *The Aristocracy of Cats.*

THERE was incessant stir and bustle in the crowded little flat, for Mrs. de Mumbles was much occupied socially, and the two bandits were left to their own devices. They knew pretty well what was going on about them. More and more they became aware of their insecurity of tenure. Gilderoy wore his yellow ribbon with an indifferent air of "you cannot adorn the rose," and kept his wits alert. Tiles and saucers of milk were pleasant enough, but danger was in the air and his whole body knew it.

Both creatures realised clearly that they had escaped, that they were being followed, and that steps were being taken for their recapture. A bell would ring . . . Hawley would enter and enquire for them . . . they would be taken ignominiously away. Dudley, of course, would play the master *rôle*, for the cat, true to his evasive nature, had attracted little attention. The point was: how was the Muddlepuddle Manor House menial to be defeated? It called for careful planning.

If they did nothing at the moment, it was because idle anticipation was not their way. Instantaneous action when the danger arrived was their immemorial method. The spontaneity of instinct

never failed them, and no attack could ever find them unprepared. Gilderoy, with his greater freedom of movement, had inspected all exits, entrances and hiding places. The King Grey Parrot, on his side, heard everything. No sound could escape his astounding ears. There would be steps in the street, shuffling up the stairs, heavy breathing at the door, a bell would ring. . . .

Square pieces of paper, meanwhile, were poked through a hole in the front door and examined by the Frump, while "Hawley . . . Dudley," repeated excitedly, were sounds both creatures knew only too well. The cat had seen this square-paper-business in other houses. They always portended trouble. Violent action followed their inspection; the human would hold such a paper close to the face, tap it, crumple, even tear it into bits and fling these on the floor for him to play with, while the face made loud noises, the features twisted, the human paced up and down the room.

Gilderoy, thus, was ready for anything that might happen, Dudley was ready, too. If the parrot showed less interest, it was because he was more resigned. He realised that without the cat's help he was rather helpless. The conditions of life had forced him to be a thinker rather than a bird of action. A pose, his main weapon of defence, could not avail against

a menial with a cage; a beak was equally inadequate.

He stared and listened.

Gilderoy, lying on his back, feet in the air, rolling his head this way and that, turned suddenly sideways. "Ain't I just wonderful to look at?" his gesture stated, as he stared upwards at his pal.

"Things are going on," was the gist of the parrot's reply to this pantomime, "I may need your help. I can't get about very quickly."

The cat rolled backwards and forwards, curled, uncurled, purring loudly in a gusty sort of way. "I'll look after you," he signalled.

They stared into each other's faces for five minutes. They were masters of attitude, these two. With humans attitudes were apt to be poses merely, but with themselves they were sincere and eloquent. Their gestures could not lie. By a hundred subtle indications the pair divined that trouble was brewing for them and that their room would be preferable to their company. The more obvious signs have been mentioned, the more delicate and mysterious ones, not easy to describe, may be omitted. It was sufficient that a bell would ring. . . .

They discussed the situation in detail after their own manner, which was by paying no attention to it, and thinking of other things. Gilderoy, thus, presently gave a couple of short, sharp sneezes, stood up, dropped softly to the floor, and marched across to his basket. This he ex-

amined intently for some minutes, as though he had never seen it before. He seemed uncertain whether to enter it or not. In the end he came to a decision. He crept in daintily, curled round, and fell asleep.

Dudley, watching him, was alone with his thoughts, and Professor Greene, had he been able to read them, would have hurriedly issued a revised edition of his book with copious addenda. The bird stood rigid on his perch, carved in stone. No feather stirred. The eyes were tight shut. His mighty beak hung sideways. His face wore a hermetic, sacerdotal grandeur nothing earthly could disturb, Mrs. Dibbs' fidgetting least of all. What I have said I have said, was his attitude, though he had said nothing at all.

His mind, none the less, was active, heated even. Could it last, one wondered? Would this brilliance, this blossoming, constitute him a Prophet among his feathered race, and set up a new standard for the entire genus? Was he to mark a new evolutionary leap? To become, with the centuries, a myth and legend, his name honoured, worshipped, deified by the squawking civilization on Pico de Papagio among the sun-kissed tree-tops?

He glanced down at sleeping Gilderoy and heaved a little sigh. His head cocked affectionately, forgivingly, as he gazed on the disreputable, plebeian ginger cat. "What are *you*, for instance?" he asked, yet without much genuine interest in his eye. "And what are you up to at this moment?" Any moment, he knew, he

would need the swift assistance of the cat . . . a bell would ring.

He was not sure how long he had been in the London flat, for clocks and calendars played no *rôle* in his life, and the stream of time just flowed from dawn to night, from meal to meal. With a hundred years of vivid memories to draw upon, and with all that Molly had said never very far away, his mind was certainly not vacant now.

Life with him was rather an endless sort of business, he felt. His adventures had begun ages before Gilderoy saw the light. They were in the gorgeous East. Some were in the South. Flats in the West were really all one to him, and whether he lived in London or in the country was, after all, immaterial. Gilderoy preferred town life evidently, and that was his own affair. Nothing betrays a character so ruthlessly as the type of thing that stimulates it. The cat was stimulated by tiles, and that was that. Dudley, having the "kernel" habit by nature, extracted the essential meaning of a situation with unerring instinct.

If now, to ordinary observation, he seemed merely in a stupor, it was due to the intensity of his thought. He kept an eye steadily on the sleeping cat. No movement in the kitchen escaped him. His ears were at their best. He even heard the faint rustle of hair as Gilderoy's sides rose and fell in sleep.

From his past in the East and South, his mind jumped abruptly to more recent memories. Molly flashed through him, and with Molly came

his Work. And he felt suddenly troubled and uneasy, if at the same time curiously exalted. The importance of this Work occurred to him instinctively. Buried in him somewhere at this very moment, deep in the abdominal recesses of his mysterious subconscious processes, this Work, he realized, was growing in importance. It was coming nearer. He knew a queer faint stirring in his under-self. Far, far down, though not actually in his little tummy, there was increased sensation — not pain exactly, yet something prophesying pain. The Work was coming on, crawling towards achievement, but towards magnificent achievement. And this consummation, when it came, would be recognised by all the world, by Gilderoy especially, but also by Molly, Hawley, the French governeess, by colonelsir-arthur, by erladyship, even by Mrs. de Mumbles and Mrs. Dibbs. . . .

There was a sound. It interrupted thought. His entire consciousness focussed in his ears. Dudley listened.

But the step on the stairs a floor below, though coming to the door of the flat, was not the one he waited for. A car had called for Mrs. de Mumbles and the porter crawled up to announce it. The Frump took her departure five minutes later—for a concert, a private view, a bohemian tea and cocktail party, and an interview with a Dealer who might buy her porcelain Chinese dragons. And the clock struck 4.30. The flat grew quiet again. Its peace was broken only by the constant telephone bell, and by the monotonous voice of

Mrs. Dibbs repeating that her mistress was not in, while she noted names, numbers and messages with intentional inaccuracy on a dirty pad.

It was on the stroke of five o'clock that a sharp ring came at the front-door bell, turning the kitchen atmosphere electric suddenly.

CHAPTER XV

" I wish I knew your trick of thought,
The perfect balance of your ways ;
They seem an inspiration, caught
From other laws in older days."

THERE can be no doubt that this King Grey Parrot did recognise one essential truth about people—that an individual, namely, had his own particular field. Within this field, he was intelligent, and might be interesting, whereas, outside it, he became foolish and incompetent, dull certainly. The plumber's mate describing why and how he left his tool at home can excite both interest and emotion in his audience; the same man's description of Relativity could do neither. Mind your own business crystallizes this truth colloquially. To judge a person's area and not tempt him beyond it was a sound rule. No matter how limited one's field, life is more coherent if one stays inside it.

Mrs. Dibbs' field at this moment was sharply defined, and Dudley was interested. What would she do about the bell? Its peal rattled, echoed, then died away.

" That's the front door again," muttered Mrs. Dibbs without interest, and having noted the fact went on reading laboriously about the horrors of degenerate Society in last week's Sunday paper. She had heard that bell before. It

differed in no way from the one she answered two hundred times a day.

The Creatures, however, knew otherwise. Both heard it, and both recognised its unusual character. No visitor of the kind the flat expected had pressed that bell. The peal had another quality. It was a stranger's ring.

There seemed no reaction in them, nothing, at least, a human would have noticed. No signal passed between them; there was no need for signals. Gilderoy, curled up asleep in his basket, did not stir. If a faint superciliousness stole upon the parrot's ascetic face, no ordinary eye could have discerned it. Nothing about him moved. He might have been the best marble. *Otium cum dignitate* was the pose he held.

The bell rang again, a longer, sharper peal this time, and Mrs. Dibbs, laying her spectacles aside with a muttered grunt, rose slowly, and moved heavily out of the kitchen and along the passage. She dawdled. She left behind her an ordinary grey parrot dozing on its perch and a common cat asleep in his basket.

Yet "ordinary" and "common" were the wrong adjectives, just as "dozing" and "asleep" were the wrong verbs. Gilderoy, as mentioned, made no movement, no whisker twitched, no quiver of an eyelid showed, the blunt pink nose lay buried among a cluster of soft, folded paws. But the cat, alert at the first ring, was doubly alert at the second. The bell held no mystery for him. And an electric change came over him. Into the centre of his feline soul it flashed with

racial power. His innards turned to flame Yet, if the ancestral Tiger in him woke, great Sabre-Tooth, he gave no sign. It was his secret.

Dudley, for his part, helpless in his fastened cage, uneasiness stirring in his ancient soul, perceived this change in his pal, yet failed, for once, to decipher it exactly. His steady motionless eye looked down upon the cat and wondered. Why, from his Library days, a particular memory cropped up, he could not say: "Tiger, tiger, burning bright in the forest of the night, What immortal hand or eye framed thy fearful symmetry?"—slipped through his mind and disappeared. His attention, besides, was in the passage with Mrs. Dibbs. His marvellous hearing never failed him. The person who had thrice rung the bell was nervously clearing his throat. Standing outside, waiting for the door to open, this person now gave a little tentative cough, and the bird recognised that cough. It was the menial from Muddlepuddle Manorouse. It was not the butler. It was what they called in those far-off days the "second-man." Dudley had heard the words too often to forget them. And his name was Hawley.

He awaited events with the philosophic courage of a centenarian to whom life, after all, can bring nothing new except its end. Gilderoy, his chief hope, did nothing. Whatever the change in him might be, it did not help. The parrot's gorge, as he observed the unsightly, indifferent cat, rose a trifle. *Non compos mentis* occurred to him, but he did not say it.

The events came quickly.

The front door was opened on the chain. "Is this Mrs. Dumbles' flat?" enquired a familiar voice.

There was a pause. Mrs. Dibbs was never flustered. "Mrs. de Mumbles hoccupies this appartment," she replied at her leisure, no traces of invitation in her tone. "If that's oo you mean."

The man's voice followed: "I've come from Muddlepuddle Manor House. Our parrot's got away. We answered your advertisement in the paper. I've brought 'is cage along."

"'ave you?" returned Mrs. Dibbs, after a monent's pause, but without taking the door off the chain.

"I'm the butler," mentioned the man, "'er Ladyship's butler."

Dudley, listening, could visualise the pair eyeing one another suspiciously, yet deriving no accurate information from the inspection. A second's gaze was enough for *him;* he knew all that was worth knowing in a single peeping flash.

"There *is* a bird what's come in," said the woman, cautiously, after a bit. "But Mrs. de Mumbles is out just now 'erself." She still kept the man standing on the stairs. "If you could call a little later praps——"

"I was to take 'im home, you see," explained the other. "On the 5.30. If I could have a look at the bird? He knows me, of course."

There was a considerable silence.

" If I could get a peep at 'im," he went on, " I'd be able to tell at once——"

Mrs. Dibbs cleared her throat hesitatingly.

" And if any reward was asked I was to give it," continued the voice, " and get the bird home before dark, you see." He mentioned the train again—5.30. " Before the cool," he added.

" Oh," said Mrs. Dibbs, non-committal, but beginning to yield. " I see."

The sound of the chain being lifted followed, with footsteps in the hall. Mrs. Dibbs had let the butler in. The faint clang of metal indicated that the cage has been set down on the floor. The door closed, and then the woman's voice was heard again in a slightly altered tone: " . . . so Mrs. de Mumbles said as she thought praps ten shillings would meet the case," she informed the butler, " seein' the trouble the bird's gone and put 'er to and all that. . . ."

There followed odd sounds that Dudley could not quite interpret, though nothing of the faint rustling and crackling escaped him, and then the man's voice mentioning that it was a warm afternoon, astonishingly warm for the time of year, with a suggestion from Mrs. Dibbs, whose tone had softened, that perhaps he would like a cup o' tea.

" D'you expect Mrs. Mumbles in soon? " he enquired, thanking her for the tea.

" Mrs. de Mumbles should be back any minute now," he was informed.

" A foreign lady, I take it, maybe? " suggested the man.

"A splash of dirty blood, I believe," the cook told him rather proudly, yet in a final voice. "A fine cage you've got there," she changed the subject.

Judging by the sound the Muddlepuddle menial was taking off his overcoat. "And a fine bird lives in it," was his reply. "Ten years or more we've had him. That's five years, come midsummer, before I went to Sir Arthur's."

"A male bird, of course?" enquired Mrs. Dibbs.

"Oh, yes, a male all right." The man chuckled slightly. "They're all males, parrots always is, you see."

"I see."

A pause that followed was broken by the man's voice: "My name, by the way, is Mr. Hawley."

"Mrs. Dibbs—I am."

"Mrs. Dibbs," he repeated.

"A good place then, p'raps you've got there?" commented the woman, the tone of voice suggesting pickings.

"Sir Arthur and her Ladyship keeps a fair house," the man told her, while Dudley distinctly heard him sniff. This sniff he used to imitate beautifully, but as no one noticed it, much less praised him for it, he had long since, being a fine judge of selections, dropped it from his *repertoire*.

"He uses a bit of language, your bird, don't he?" came abruptly from Mrs. Dibbs. She laughed.

The man laughed, too. "Not much he doesn't know," he agreed. "He can say about anything he wants to," he went on proudly, as though it reflected credit on himself. "It's astonishing what I've heard 'im say—fine language and bad, and foreign talk in Latin, and whistling hymns—oh, he's a bird in a thousand, is Dudley——"

"He's dropped a word or two 'ere," agreed Mrs. Dibbs admiringly, "but he hasn't said much on the 'ole. Keeps hisself to hisself mostly."

"Ah, he's got to know you first," explained the man, "and like you, too," he added confidingly.

The sounds of the cage being divested of its coverings, then of Mr. Hawley hanging up his overcoat were heard. "You don't happen to know," he enquired casually, "how much your lady paid, do you, Mrs. Gibbs?"

The footsteps had been coming down the passage, but now stopped.

"Paid—Mr. 'Awley?"

"What she gave for 'im, I mean?" he explained.

"Gave?" repeated the cook.

"Well, the old bird didn't exactly walk to London, did he? And he can't fly, not with that clipped wing, you see. He's a stolen bird, of course. Someone stole 'im, then sold 'im to your lady. That's 'ow it's usually done, I believe."

"Well, now, I thought that's wot you meant," said the woman, after a moment's pause, "but I wasn't quite sure. I didn't want to 'urt any-

body's feelings, you understan'. Oh, it was nothing much," she informed him airily. "She give the man a trifle of a pound, according to what she said."

"A pound," commented the other. "She didn't get a receipt either, I presume," he stated rather than asked.

"As to that," Mrs. Dibbs replied, "I reely couldn't say, Mr. 'Awley. She keeps them things in a bag. She only came up from the country two days ago, and she brought the bird in with her. She might be glad to find 'im gone and everything settled. She'll be back any minute now."

They had reached the kitchen door at last.

"I've been put to a lot of trouble over this parrot myself," was how Mr. Hawley countered this. "And I suppose the cost of the Ad. would likely have to be reckoned, too," he suggested, as they approached the door.

"Maybe it would," Mrs. Dibbs opined. That had not occurred to her. They entered the kitchen.

"Aha! My beauty!" exclaimed Mr. Hawley in a confidential voice. "So there you are, are you!"

Dudley had listened to this conversation with the keenest attention; little had escaped him; they were inside their fields respectively and he was interested; and the different tones of voice he had followed with unerring instinct, interpreting them correctly. He had so far made no comment, no audible comment being called for.

As a student of life he had observed the material presented to him, no more than that.

The moment Mr. Hawley came into view, however, a remark occurred to him. He produced it in a loud, clear voice, a male voice, a gentleman's voice.

"Hullo! Second-man, Hullo!" he offered Sir Arthur's growl. "Dudleydudleydudley!"

Mrs. Dibbs, he was pleased to observe, heard it. She grinned.

At the same instant, however, he observed another thing as well. And it disconcerted him, almost as much as his spoken word had disconcerted Mr. Hawley.

Now that the speakers came objectively before him, he withdrew his mind from the passage, where he had been visualising the pair, and stared at them in *propria personae*. He took accurate note of his immediate surroundings. Instead of listening, he gazed. Down to the last detail he took in what he saw. And it was this intimate survey that disconcerted him.

If aware for some time subconsciously that a certain change had taken place about him, he had not troubled to ascertain its precise nature. He now perceived that some familiar detail was lacking; an alteration in the landscape had occurred. This familiar detail, while he had been busy listening, had been withdrawn.

What was it? he asked himself.

He began to examine.

For once, however, his ominscence failed to report as instantaneously as usual.

The alteration in his landscape remained at first concealed.

Then, suddenly, he discovered what the missing detail was.

Gilderoy had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVI

So far as mere agility goes, the common house cat probably surpasses all its clan, if not every known species of quadruped.

O. H. Powell.—*The Armament of Animals.*

THIS withdrawal of his principal hope vexed the parrot. That the friend he had brought to town with so much trouble had slipped away without a word of good-bye was annoying, but that the cat had contrived it without being noticed was derogatory. If, at the same time, he realized it was no ordinary disappearance, but a calculated one, it yet enraged the kindly, courteous bird. A storm rose in his grand little heart.

At the very moment, therefore, when Mr. Hawley tried to cover the second-man remark with "Ah, there he is, my old Dudley! That's him! He knows me, and what's more, he loves me too. Now, give us Lead Kindly Light. Just see if he don't!", the parrot relieved his emotions in a prolonged and heart-felt scream.

"That's pleasure at seeing me," explained Mr. Hawley, while Mrs. Dibbs stopped her ears. "I know what he wants. He wants his covering put on." And the man cast about till he found the spotty cloth, and then spread it over the cage, in doing which, his head being turned sideways to Mrs. Dibbs, his thumb and forefinger came within easy reach of the formidable beak. Un-

willing to injure his pal, Dudley had no such restraint where the second man was concerned, and his anger accepted the relief offered. He bit the second man's finger with decision.

"Drat the brute!" muttered the victim under his breath, while Mrs. Dibbs enquired if it hurt. "It's only his play," he replied, nursing his finger, "that's all it is reely. Only 'e forgets the grip 'e's got. We're the best of friends just the same," he explained. "Aren't we, Dudley?"

The bird stared with a painless eye, saying nothing.

"Well, there ain't no mark much, anyhow," agreed the woman, turning from a brief examination to the teapot. "But he do love you, Mr. 'Awley, don't he, that bird?" she added sarcastically. "Yours is China, maybe?" she went on. "*We* use China 'ere. Hearl Grey. And I'm partial to it meself."

"That'll do nicely for me, yes," replied the man. "You like it strong same as I do probably," he suggested.

"Oh, average," replied Mrs. Dibbs, putting in four piled spoons' full.

"Your things not mine, *à bas les boches*, second man, *tedium vitae ad valorem*," gabbled Dudley behind his cloth.

"There, you see," said Mr. Hawley quickly, "if he's not as quiet as a lamb again, and talking Spanish to show he's happy. That's always a sign of pleasure with 'im, Spanish is."

"Lepidoptera goodbye for the present Dudleydudley," the bird interjected.

" I'll leave the cloth on," said the man, anxious to show his knowledge, " or he might scream a bit again, and a trifle extra light and air won't hurt 'im." He shifted the cage round a bit, cautiously this time, towards the open window. " There's a good Dudley boy! " he cooed, though he would gladly have wrung his neck. " We'll soon have you back in your nice comfortable home, won't we then? " He sat back in the chair Mrs. Dibbs had placed for him and waited for his cup of tea. " His heart's in the right place, you see," he added. " Yes, I take a spot of sugar, thank you. And d'you objec' to a cigarette? " He lit one of Sir Arthur's Balkan Sobranje, large size.

" Mrs. de Mumbles smokes 'erself," the woman gave her consent, " and the winder's open any'ow."

The parrot, meanwhile, becoming bored with the second man and the cook, since the servants' hall was not his world, withdrew into his own private and personal region. He caught a few fragments of chat from time to time, but nothing worthy of his attention. Mr. Hawley's reference to the " cat in the ad.," his disbelief that it had come to London " with our bird," his description of Gilderoy as " a common ginger beast with torn ears," and the cook's assurance that it was " Jest a London stray off the riles "—he noted these remarks but did not contribute to them. With his inimitable air of What I have said I have said, he left the vulgar menials to their ungrammatical chat, preferring his own purple dreams. Of flight and nuts, of hot sunshine, foliage, flowers, of

numerous companions, of sex, age, nests and eggs—of all these his golden dreams formed a lovely *purée*. His inaudible gabble hardly travelled beyond his beak, though its gurgle accompanied his dreams. In this extremely low voice he said most interesting things. These issued from his motionless face in a ceaseless flow of indistinguishable sounds, musical as rain-drops on a summer lawn:

Osisicomnes . . . cuckoogotohell . . . suntlacrymaererum aprioriadinfinitum . . . pollywantacrackergilderoy . . . sictransitblastyergizzard . . . . mumblessecondmanhawleydudleydudley . . . ." poured forth, all too low to be heard clearly.

His toes moved gently up and down and to and fro. He was in one of his little ecstasies, due to suppressed excitement.

The flat, though its owner did not return, filled comfortably. People trickled in. The masseur arrived by appointment, a female secretary, a hair-dresser, a visitor or two to whom wrong dates had been sent, also Maria, in case she could help her mother " with anythink." She joined the cook and second man in the kitchen over a cup of tea with " I don't mind if I do! "

It was the best China they drank, not because they preferred it to stewed Liptons provided for the kitchen, but because it was a perquisite they considered they had a right to. " Pale-looking muck " Maria called it, " and without a bite in a gallon," although Mr. Hawley assured her it was " the stuff," and sipped it nicely. In the intervals between callers and tea-sipping, the

telephone rang frequently to the repeated comment of Maria. "Let 'er wait! She's pide to ring!" —a gibe at Mrs. de Mumbles that showed confusion of thought somewhere, while Mrs. Dibbs attended to the messages, noting them down on the dirty pad with her usual inaccuracy. "The sooperviser can put 'er right," she announced. "They love each other—I don't think."

From time to time one or other approached the cage, while the second man described Miss Molly's passionate love of the bird, explaining that she had been crying a good deal since it disappeared. Dudley's personality and character also were referred to, his habits, language, gifts, his sex and age as well; "he's a hundred if he's a day, and his 'earing—why he could 'ear a pin drop if 'e wanted to!" with all manner of other information, all given nicely enough, however, and nothing to cause offence.

One item alone stirred his interest, and stirred it deeply. From the second man it came chiefly: "Oh, yes, they can lay eggs in captivity sometimes, and do, I'm told——" Maria interrupted with "Not the miles shorely, Mr. 'Awley?" "Oh, both sorts," insisted the man. "Without outside assistance?" Mrs. Dibbs wanted to know. "Just so," the second man assured her. "But it's a sign of the end, they say. It's generally when they're going to die. Sort of a last big effort to keep going, you know, and it exhausts 'em so that they go. You can ask the Keeper at the Zoo," he insisted, as the ladies appeared incredulous. "It's a scientific fact all right,"

To all of which Dudley, wiser than ever since he came to town, made no reply. Beyond mumbling "*fiat justitia*" to his last remarks, he said nothing audible. He held his pose and perch with unassailable imperturbability. No feather stirred, no eyelid lifted, he remained poised and self-contained. A good judge of publics, he ignored this particular one. They praised him—he accepted it without a flutter; they cursed him—he was far away; they coaxed and wheedled—he gave no sign. He contented himself with the inaudible gabble that was not meant for thick-ears.

Once only he startled them:

"Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*!" shattered the tea-party atmosphere, producing a chorus of comments, curses, questions, explanations from Mr. Hawley, and a shower of unflattering remarks.

To these, too, he offered no reply. He had called to his pal with a purpose that was his own: a significant call that conveyed many things: "I'm here. Where are you? I count on you. I've forgiven your desertion. Time's getting on. There's danger . . . !"

Camouflaged against a chimney all this time, Gilderoy, dominating the dingy landscape like an Osirian, his attitude *couchant*, his torn ears and patched eye adding to his air of royalty, Gilderoy, of course, had heard that call. Like his friend, however, he betrayed no symptom of emotion. He remained precisely as he was in an attitude of couching innocence. Nothing could have appeared more guileless. It seemed one of his

rare direct periods. Yet, when he appeared direct, straightforward, frank, was just when he was most slanting, for he was by nature fundamentally and essentially oblique in all his ways. And now, behind the sphinx-like visage thought worked fast and fiery. The change in him has already been mentioned. It became intensified. Great Sabre-tooth, in racial might, stalked invisibly across the world of tiles. And flat-faced Gilderoy was aware of that deathless fellow, his grim, ghostly ancestor.

He knew, of course, that the second man had come with the cage, for he had removed himself in order to avoid the menial's boot. But he knew another thing as well—that Dudley's liberty was at stake. He had not brought his friend to London just to see a recapture staged! Besides he did not want to go himself. He was thus twice ready and twice armed.

"It's up to me," was the way a human might have put it, but the cat's mask-like countenance was far more eloquent, his family resource far more prolific. Not only was he the cleanest animal in the world, he had nine lives as well, and was thus nine times more faithful than any other quadruped. His adoration of his pal was in multiples of three. And when the Call came sounding across the deserted roof, he responded inwardly. Every fibre of his electric body warned him that danger was at hand. The attack was coming. Dudley, poor helpless bird with clipped wings, would be arrested and removed. His liberty was at stake.

This rendering into human words of the yowl that expressed his thoughts was heard by more than Dudley, for whom it was intended. He dodged the piece of coal that came hurtling towards him from an attic window, but dodged it by not moving, fully aware that human aim was poor. If he did not stir physically, however, he took steps mentally. Forgetting his tiles and parties, his milk and mice, he became protective, aggressive, too. His inmost nature went a-stalking. He reviewed his powers of speed, of silence, of balancing, of leaping, of seeing in the dark, of ever falling on his feet. He kept his marvellous eyes wide open, his hair prickly with electricity, his wireless whiskers cleaned to their ultimate efficiency. Upon other ancient and incalcuable privileges he called as well. He had known Sabbaths! His awful and mighty instincts stirred to life, and through the recesses of his ginger body prowled an ancestor, sabre-tooth, the Master Tiger.

He fell asleep. Dudley also probably indulged in a little sleep. He remained at any rate, lost in his own sweet dreamland while the impromptu tea-party continued its dreary way. Perhaps an hour passed, when he became aware of something new—of two things that were new: first, that the light was fading, and, second, that his immediate landscape presented a fresh detail.

The bird returned to the present and took note.

The woof of his happy dream was interrupted; the woof of his spotty cloth was stirring, too.

It was not the tea-drinkers. He perceived a small roundish object moving stealthily towards his metal door. It pushed the cloth aside, cautiously it rose towards the latch, then, with a swift, deft jab, it raised the metal catch on the outside. After which it withdrew as noiselessly as it had come. The door was unfastened now, and Dudley could do the rest from inside the cage. Gilderoy's clever paw had vanished again, its owner with it. Where the cat had vanished *to* was of no importance at the moment; a plan was afoot, and that was sufficient.

The parrot gave no outward sign that he had noticed. Balanced on his perch, motionless as a china bird upon a mantelpiece, his observation, however, became, if possible, a shade more acute. His watchwords, for the moment, he realised, must be silence and immobility, patience above all. And, turning his attention to the kitchen, he saw through threadbare sections of his cloth, that a black bottle now stood beside the teapot, a bottle he recognized easily from his shipping days of long ago. "Better than that slippery China stuff," Maria was saying to the second man, who was wiping his lips with a coloured handkerchief whose embroidered monogram included no letters of his own name.

Gilderoy had chosen his moment with consummate skill, and if Dudley's vegetarian stomach turned a little towards nausea as he caught the nasty whiff of what he had often heard called "adropogin," he controlled himself admirably, fully aware that nausea could lead to sounds that

must draw attention to himself. He had more important matters to consider: that his door now stood towards the open window, and that this door was no longer latched.

His present job, obviously, was to adapt himself to the change in his environment, and it called upon all his wisdom to accomplish this. An individual remains the same, yet changes when details about him change. Only the self-centred imagine otherwise, and Dudley was never that. An individual in his own place is the ruler of his fate, and the feathered biped held firmly to his perch. He adapted himself to his altered environment by a masterly silence and immobility. Wishing to be inconspicuous, he knew the secret was to do nothing unusual, better still, to do nothing at all.

Dudley, accordingly, did nothing at all. Nor did he lose power by the worry of internal considering. He thus retained in his perfect and compact little body the energy he would need when the moment for action came.

This moment arrived very soon.

There came a faint clanking sound outside in the passage that was unquestionably the front door chain rattling. The noise galvanised the Tea Party into startled attitudes. Each member of the guilty crew acted with a spontaneity almost worthy of the animal kingdom.

"That's 'er," said Maria, assuming a look of childhood innocence. She moved to the cupboard with the bottle and in a twinkling the three cups had followed it out of sight.

" Pity," mentioned Mr. Hawley, smacking his lips. He, too, was on his feet in a second, smalming his hair, putting his tie straight, and calling up instantaneously an expression of dignified servility.

Mrs. Dibbs, owing to her bulk, perhaps, betrayed no sign of haste, yet had emptied the tea-leaves into the sink and restored the teapot to its shelf before the second man had arranged his master's tie to his liking. She was too experienced to be flustered. " No 'urry," she observed calmly. " It'll take 'er five minutes getting in."

For it was her employer's custom to save herself the trouble of inserting the Yale key or even pushing the bell. Her hands being generally occupied with parcels, her habit was to shake the door-handle with her elbow, so that both letter-box and chain gave out a rattling sound. It was, thus, perhaps a couple of minutes after the disturbing noises, that Mrs. Dibbs thumped heavily down the passage to open the door, leaving Mr. Hawley and Maria to await events in the kitchen. They stood with their backs to the window, their attention followed Mrs. Dibbs. They did not notice, apparently, something red shoot past their legs along the floor.

Dudley, however, did notice it—and took instant action. He did not hesitate a second.

Quietly, without a sign of nervous haste, he waddled along his perch, climbed noiselessly down the bars till he reached the floor of his cage, strutted across this as lazily as though he swaggered down Piccadilly, passed through the

open door, and stepped out delicately upon the table's edge. Turning his gaze steadily for one instand downwards, he then committed his precious body to the care of empty space with complete nonchalance. He dropped neatly, silently, landing with accurate precision upon a ginger-coloured furry back ready to receive him on the linoleum three feet below. An upward leap came next; it was as swift and soundless as the other movements. Ten seconds later Gilderoy and his friend were out upon the roof; two minutes later they were some yards away behind a big chimney - stack, the open desert of London's tiles spreading about them as far as the eye could see.

"Not 'er after all!" the voice of Mrs. Dibbs reached them faintly. "One of them blarsted errand boys or somethink . . . porter asleep in his box as per usual. . . . !"

The sound died away amid a confused murmur of general remarks that no longer interested the two adventurers who were now concerned solely with their new surroundings. They let everything else slide. Gilderoy, at any rate, lowering his back too abruptly, let the King Parrot slide.

"*Facile descensus* hullo Dudley," observed the bird, picking himself up again and feeling the lead tentatively beneath his straddling feet. "Stet," he added, recovering his perfect balance.

Gilderoy, making himself as big as possible, stood proudly beside him. "Look at me, will you?" his attitude said plainly. "I'm a great, fierce tiger! I could protect anything! I've saved you!"

CHAPTER XVII

As a parrot increases its knowledge it also, of course, increases greatly in value. . . . They Grey Parrot is a very sensitive creature.—W. T. GREENE.

WHILE Gilderoy mopped his face softly with one paw, Dudley looked about him over the new territory and found it uninspiring. The late evening sunlight fell slanting across the dreariest expanse of monotonous grimy bricks and slates he had ever seen. The forest of chimneys stood up grimly. A stiff, soulless and uncompromising world of ugliness met his gaze, chilly too, and with danger lurking behind its apparent emptiness. All worlds, he knew, seem pleasant and interesting to their rightful natives, but this one, for all its novelty of atmosphere, did not stimulate him. It seemed to him potentially full of cats. It was certainly not his world. He felt *déclassé*.

At any rate he had escaped from the menial and his cage. He had done his friend a good turn as well. His resource and courage, his Buddhist gift for right action, had not failed him. And these reflections comforted him so that he felt proud and pleased. He felt also in a blue funk.

"Jolly, eh?" suggested Gilderoy, stepping to and fro in front of him with tail erect and gazing into his eyes. "I managed the front door pretty well, eh? Jolly up here, isn't it—eh?" he

repeated, looking about him as a showman looks. "Good for your work—eh?"

"Goddam, goddam!" said Dudley as carelessly as he could. He felt extremely unsafe; he resented, too, his dependence on his friend, though pride made him hide it. "*Parva sed goddam apta*," he added in a voice too low to be audible.

A cat-call sounded faintly over the distant roofs. Gilderoy was licking his chops. "It's grand at night," he went on, his tail undulating expressively, "More than you can count!" he explained, his blunt nose quivering. He glanced at the sky, now fading towards dusk, and the parrot caught the first hint of red glimmer in his eyes. He knew quite well that it was the night army of cats his friend referred to. He shivered visibly. "Cuckoo!" was the only thing that occurred to him to say, and even that fell rather thickly from his beak.

"I shall be here!" mentioned Gilderoy protectively, strutting up and down, and interpreting the shiver correctly.

"I shan't!" Dudley squawked loudly, without an instant's hesitation, suddenly finding his voice.

"Not so loud!" the other warned him, turning his head nervously, with whiskers twitching. Voices, indeed, were now audible not far away.

Though the sky was clear, the air still warm, a light wind puffed across the desolate roofs, making the bird shiver a little. The one thing he saw that cheered him was a group of filthy sparrows sweeping about gustily like blown leaves among

the chimneys. The sight of these comrades of his own element, degraded by human associations though they were, warmed his heart a trifle, if they could not warm his body. At the same time they made him feel still more *déclassé*. Hooligans, gamins, guttersnipes, they were not of his own set, but at least they could use their wings and fly.

His sense of insecurity deepened, his misery increased. He resented more bitterly than ever his dependence on the cat. To such a pitch, indeed, did his unhappiness come, the chill and growing darkness adding to it, that he began to realize that the comfortable security of a cage had something to be said for it. Even Muddle-puddle, with regular meals and an equable temperature, was not so bad after all. He decided to do something. And he was about to take steps accordingly, when Gilderoy himself suddenly did something that surprised him so that he changed his mind.

Gilderoy, who had been watching him closely, moved abruptly nearer and lowered his back to a convenient angle, his tail wiggling excitedly, his eyes cast behind him like twin warning lighthouses.

"Hurry up, will you!" every gesture of his agile body shrieked.

"Goddamdudley," responded the parrot, equally alert, for he, too, heard the nasty sound of voices coming nearer—the second man and Maria both talking simultaneously. But, despite his anxiety, he was not to be hurried. Noblesse

obliged, in action as in conduct. He moved at his leisure, the small, glorious bird, mounting easily, with the dignified grace of some 18th century grand dame who mounts a palfrey. "First to the ri' and second to the lef' and then straight on," he gabbled thickly, as the cavalcade moved off.

They started and the sparrows watched them go. Gilderoy said nothing, but went hell for leather, so that his rider had to use beak and claws to keep his precarious seat. The voices had been too close for safety, and the cat was taking no chances. He felt responsible for his crippled pal. His tiger-heart took charge.

"Cut it out!" squawked the parrot, but Gilderoy only stuck his tail more stiffly in the air and hissed over his shoulder: "Hold on to that!" doubling and turning like a swallow in the air.

Dudley held on. No one should say he showed weakness in the face of danger. Chimneys and wireless poles shot past like a level paling; the keen air nipped as it rushed by. There were leaps and flying landings, they bounded, almost flew. "He thinks he's going to a Sabbath," occurred to Dudley, but he did not say it. He had no breath left. Real flying he had known, of course, but these sudden awful swerves were clumsy compared to wings.

They slowed up once, as though Gilderoy hesitated for a second which way to flash. Only a second it was, but it gave Dudley time to peep into an open attic window through which he

glimpsed, as they shot by, a bearded face with horn-rimmed spectacles and a big quill pen between his teeth. A man, an elderly man, was hard at work evidently, for books and papers were visible on a table. He wore a worried look.

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" called the King Grey Parrot, as they darted off again, and was just in time to see the head turn sharply, while the eyes stared into space, the quill dropped from the parted lips, and a hand rose behind one ear to form a cup.

The picture vanished . . . for Gilderoy, recognising the window whence coal and brushes came, increased his speed, and a few minutes later they reached a skylight through whose broken panes a kind of disused loft was visible in the gloaming. Gilderoy stopped as abruptly as he had started. It was, obviously, a terminus.

"My bloody stars!" ejaculated Dudley, clinging to the tail a moment, then falling off sideways in a heap. "*O tedium vitae laborare est orare*," he gabbled beneath his breath, as he quickly found his feet and equilibrium. His speech was confused. He was excited, and not ashamed to show it.

"Here," indicated Gilderoy, calm as though he just woke out of sleep, no sign of breathlessness either, "you will be warm and safe." He peered down through the dirty glass into the gloomy space below.

"Humph!" remarked Dudley, without any apparent gratitude.

He, too, in his turn inspected the warm safe

place. A box-room evidently, belonging to another building of flats below. He saw trunks, a bicycle, gun-cases, piled carpets, a perambulator, a number of huge square packing-cases, and various other paraphernalia.

"Humph!" he repeated soullessly. With his superior sense of direction, though they had covered a considerable distance, he had a shrewd suspicion that they had travelled in a circle.

A long cord, he saw, hung from the catch that closed the skylight, dropping down into the shadowy depths as into a well. The bird inspected this cord with careful interest. Thought worked rapidly. It was remarkable how intercourse between the two creatures at this period became easy, unimpeded. The stimulus of danger, added to the educational drive of London life, produced, as it were, an intensification of consciousness they shared equally. There was nothing, it seemed, they could not convey to one another by sound, pantomime and gesture. A scientist observing the pair must have recognised how the speech-centres in the brain are but a development of the hand-gesture centres. Cat and parrot exchanged ideas, even repartee, as easily as humans do.

"Humph!" gurgled Dudley, returning from his long inspection and gazing vacantly into his friend's gleaming eyes.

"*You* can climb down that cord," observed Gilderoy. "*I* can't." there was unusual delicacy in the way he put it. No cat, he intended to convey, could get in.

"Warmth?" enquired the parrot, realizing that he might spend most of the night in this gloomy priest-hole. "I'm partial to a bit of warmth, you know."

Gilderoy strutted like some marvellous mechanical toy, purring while he did so. His face wore an air of exceeding pride and satisfaction.

"Frump's petticoat," he snapped tersely, pointing with his muzzle downwards. His mouth produced a grin the like of which the parrot had never seen before; it turned his pal into a terrifying gargoyle. "It's all ready for you."

Through the broken pane, sure enough, Dudley now perceived a garment of sorts, taken obviously from Mrs. de Mumbles' bedroom, lying on the dirty floor below But it was not a petticoat. He saw the black and gold pattern of something he had studied already in the flat, something he knew instinctively would keep him warm, a shawl, an Indian shawl. "If the cats can see me," ran his thoughts, "yet not get at me, it might be tolerable. I like the touch of colour, too." And his heart rose in a storm of gratitude and admiration. Gilderoy's desertion, after all, had been merely strategy. He had shown forethought, too.

"Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*!" he screamed with pleasure, at the top of his voice, unable to repress his feelings.

The unaccustomed sound fled piercingly across the world of tiles.

Gilderoy turned upon him like a tiger.

"Shut up!" he hissed fiercely, "or I'll—eat you! They're after us!"

In the deep silence that followed this explosion of unusual sound, the cackle of approaching voices was distinctly audible—the contralto of Mrs. Dibbs, the husky gin-voice of Maria, the oily tones of Mr. Hawley.

"Hop in and slip down that cord!" commanded Gilderoy sharply. "They'll not notice *me*. Quick as you like! I'll come back when all's clear again." He vanished.

In a moment, forgetting dignity, using claws and beak, Dudley scrabbled through the broken pane and down the hanging cord on to the floor below. The dimness swallowed him. He marched solemnly into the darkest corner of the loft behind the perambulator; a gun-case cloaked his handsome tail; an old leather portmanteau hid his slender body; his lordly head was screened by a shapeless and disgusting pile of ancient carpets. He was safe. "I'm marvellous, marvellous," he gabbled to himself, "qui' all ri' Dudley *pax vosbiscum*." While, far above him, he heard Maria saying with emphasis: "no taime parrot could ever 'ide up here . . . scream 'is guts out, 'e would, in this cold hair . . . 'e's in the flat all this time, of course . . . " and then, a moment later, the sound of withdrawing footsteps growing fainter as the searchers went back to their kitchen again.

Without an instant's delay, Dudley then saw to his own comfort. Picking at the Indian shawl

with claws and beak, he managed eventually to cover his cooling little figure so as to protect it from the raw air in the disused, dreary loft. Warmer than the night it was, but chilly for all that.

A moment or two later, he stood there, a silent statue in black and gold. Both wonderful and interesting his appearance was. A hundred cats might admire him from above, but they could not reach him. Resigned and philosophical, he adorned this cold dusty corner of a dirty loft, aware of his own mangificence, aware also that he had not been taken away by the loathsome second man, aware, further, that, for the moment at any rate, he was comparatively safe and comparatively warm.

"*Omnia exeunt in mysterium*," he gabbled softly, and fell into deep thought. "I shall now make use of my opportunities," he told himself. "I shall study life as I find it." And he drew the shawl closer about his little shoulders with his terrible beak.

Motionless, wearing his marble pose, he used as perch a bundle of umbrellas and walking-sticks tied up with rotting string. There was no need to trouble about camouflage, for the darkness draped him sufficiently. Making the most of his opportunities, as usual, he fell to studying life as he found it.

CHAPTER XVIII

Just like dogs, the Grey Parrot is too human in many respects to be made merchandise of, and be bought and sold in cold blood.—W. T. GREENE.

Cats are the fiercest, strongest, and most terrible of beasts.—KINGSLEY. *Natural History of Animals.*

THE dusk slipped into darkness, the night wore on, the stars peeped down, and the tiles re-echoed to the slither and patter of the horde of cats. An undercurrent of padding ran everywhere, as though the whole world had gone a-prowling, and a criss-cross of minute green shaft-lights mapped the sky. Gilderoy's " more than you can count " was his own private estimate, yet there must have been a hundred tails which meant two hundred eyes, four hundred feet. Their music rose and fell beneath the moon, as the world-old orgies, abandoned, wild, fantastic, shamed the glad golden stars and turned the sweet dew colder in its purity. Here reigned, as it has ever reigned just beneath the thin veneer of civilization, the raw conditions of primitive life. Instinct was king, and appetite the only law

" *Sic transit,*" murmured the King Grey Parrot, excited in spite of his marble pose, " I'm safe perhaps, but I might be bloody safer *summum bonum* Dudley! "

The bird's great thoughts, let it be mentioned at once, lie open to inspection, to inevitable

doubt and criticism as well. They must be many, of course, who hold that he had no thoughts at all, that his highest flights were actually no more than " I'm hungry . . . I'm cold . . . I'm thirsty . . . My beak wants cutting . . . I hate this seed . . . ! " The majority will sneer at the idea that his compact little body was a mass of complicated eloquence, that beak, claws, feathers and eyes could conceive, much less convey, philosophical reflections, that he had a mind at all, indeed. Yet few, be it remembered, can even read the script of Nature, written in easy capitals though it is; still fewer interpret the voices of wind and water; the vast majority, in fact, failing to notice what lies beneath their very noses. The Mollies of this world, in whom great love wakens the gift of discernment, are inevitably rare. The superior folk who thus deny to Dudley his modest gifts are only to be pitied, not argued with, and superiority, ever an acid virtue, must be their consolation.

And now, at this moment, when the King Grey Parrot introduced " *summum bonum* " into his little sentence, he did not do this idly. He realized in a word, that this occasion in a dirty loft among the tiles was somehow a step further towards the consummation of the spot of Work he was born to achieve. This he knew surely. At the same time—and here his honesty shows finely—he admitted he did not yet know exactly what this Work might be. His powers, intensified though they were in London, had not reached quite as far as that.

On his impromptu perch of umbrellas he was content to observe what fate pleased to offer. This night behaviour of the roof-cats was interesting. He, naturally, drew deductions. Progress, he knew, among quadrupeds, did not exist. To keep both feet on the ground, of course, was necessary to sanity and good judgment—had he not practised it all his life?—but when it came to four feet, the result apparently was degrading. They were just animals, over weighted with thick earthly qualities, eager only to increase their species at the greatest possible rate.

It was a depressing thought, and he stepped on to a higher umbrella. He took the shawl with him, draping it neatly over his tail so that he now wore a train.

"They know not air," sang a tiny voice inside his great bursting little heart, "nor wings, nor flight. How, then, can they hope to soar? Many of them live even underground, away from light and colour, and their eyes turn naturally downwards. "Ho!" he cried, "for a swinging nest among the winds of heaven! Ho! for the bird's eye view! Ho! for the sweet liberty of endless space!" And for some minutes he continued to add further "ho's" at intervals, until he realized that the sound of his voice was making his presence dangerously conspicuous.

For dim moving shapes cast disagreeable shadows, and there was nasty soft slithering across his sky-light, with sharp clicking sounds that were the tap of sliding claws.

The London cats, he perceived, were on the move. These knew, of course, that an alien was in their neighbourhood, while Instinct led them to hope that this alien might be, more precisely, presently in their very midst. They knew exactly where he lurked, what he was, how even he would taste. But to get at him lay beyond their powers. They could not squeeze through the pane of broken glass, nor, once through, could they have climbed down the hanging cord.

Dudley, secure, reasonably warm, extremely observant, knew all this. Maintaining his *rigor mortis* pose, he stopped his noise. He held his beak and shivered. His eyes kept an upward cast. He watched. A hundred claws, he noted, passed scrabbling over the slippery surface of the skylight, then down again in disappointed rage. A hundred damp pads left criminal prints upon the panes, and twice fifty pair of eyes, alight with the green lust of primitive desire, peered down into the chily disused loft. Tails by the score flicked evilly across the moistened glass, sleek furry bodies brushed the dew away, teeth by the dozen gleamed, and heated breath left blurred patches everywhere.

But entrance to their owners was denied.

Perched on his moth-eaten brollies, the bird noted these items carefully. He commented on them, naturally enough, but so low that his own ears hardly caught the sound: "*Postobit, ad-valorem, inextremis*," gave the gist of what he said. And if he shivered continuously it was but

the currents of air in this draughty hole that set his lighter feathers dancing.

The skylight growing clear at last and the scurry of feet sweeping away elsewhere, he fell to other occupations, realizing that he had time to burn. Gilderoy, even had his presence been desired, put in no appearance. The parrot, finding himself in darkness, with nothing outward to stimulate reflection, turned his thought to the few objects he could see. These he discerned but dimly—the trunks, perambulator, carpets, bicycle, packing-cases. It was enough, this sketchy view. These stored things belonged obviously to persons who believed themselves important and were hence devoid of humour. Who but the humourless, he asked himself, would wish to keep such things? Only those who never experienced the sweet acid joy of laughing at themselves could possibly think it worth while to store carpets, brollies, walking sticks, bicycles and perambulators in a loft?

He at once dismissed them from his mind. Thought turned inwards. And if it be denied that Dudley, the Grey King Parrot, thought and felt all this, the claim must be disallowed as contrary to fact, tied with red tape, marked "for comment" in the margin, and at once pigeon-holed, which means forgotten.

He now searched for novelty, since novelty, he believed, being startling and producing a certain shock, increases the temperature of the body. Time passed quickly and, since thought and emotion are essentially life, life seemed very

full and rich. Poignant, indeed his emotions were, but he never allowed feeling to disturb judgment. He reached judicial conclusions on a variety of subjects, and knowing that intellect without wisdom has small value, he avoided both judicial wit and judicial ignorance. He felt cold, hungry, thirsty, lonely, bored. He discovered, however, that ennui, being negative, is a depleting business, while a dry throat and an empty abdomen, being positive, can stimulate.

If novelty, however, did not present itself, a gentle nostalgia came in its place. Thought turned to home and Molly, above all to the little golden-haired girl who loved him, protected him from pain and discomfort, and who believed so wholeheartedly in his greatness. He spoke aloud, calling her by name: "Hullo, Molly! Hullo, Dudley!" echoed faintly through the miserable loft. "Molly's gone out," he answered himself in Nannie's voice. "Mollie's gone to the cinema, Polly! Cinemafancinemafan! Mollypollydudleydudley!" he went on softly for some minutes. "Mollycinemacinemadudleygone out!"

He kept his voice very low, so as not to attract attention to the skylight, and the sound hardly travelled beyond the bicycle which he could just see in its corner opposite. The words comforted him a trifle, though they could not stay the pangs of hunger. He felt a little warmer, in his heart at any rate. And the word "cinema" revived memories of the child's description of screen-stories she had seen. He had heard these by the score, knew every detail of the business

by heart, and had listened by the hour to what she said about them. He knew that parrots had figured with advantage on the screen, but that there was yet a Great Picture to be made with a grey parrot, a K.G.P., as she called it, and that Molly had even begun to write it: *The Adventures of a K.G.P*, with himself featuring as hero.

The story was to be terribly poignant, yet terribly restrained, terribly brief, yet terribly expensive as well. He would appear in one picture only, for there would be only one—himself. Like the lion that opens and shuts its mouth before a Goldwyn production, he would appear full face and remark "*verb. sap.*," for it was to be a Movie-tone, of course, then turn profile and say "exit," and the hall would thunder with applause. Molly had promised to take him herself to the First Show, which would be called Premiere Presentation. There would be Parisian Night Clubs, Hotels de Luxe with magnificent Entrance Halls, but extremely shabby bedrooms, and the whole thing, having taken ten years to make, would be produced at Enormous Expense running, indeed, into millions. The Cast would be all Dudley, for Dudley would play every *rôle* himself.

These glowing memories made him feel distinctly warmed, as the detail he was so familiar with revived. He gabbled them over to himself. He even visualised the announcement on the screen: It would be produced by Ikey, photographed by Moses, directed by Jacob, with captions by Samuel, and dresses by Madame

Levi. The film editor would be Isaac, assistant director, Benjamin, and scenic artists, the Brothers Solomon. Steinherz would write the music, with Mayer as technician, Apfelbaum as editor of sub-titles, and Isador Schoen, assistant-sub-editor of sub-titles. Settings were to be by Jonathan, and sex-appeal by Dan and Askalon; art-editor was Aaron, associate editor, Josef, and production-editor, Marks, and the whole would be made in the Jerusalem Studios at Clapham, S.W.95. Many other names recurred to him, but he finally found memory disappearing among the Ghettos of Europe. His own name, as joint-author with Molly, would be flashed on the screen in minute lettering for a fraction of a second only, too swift, too tiny to be legible. . . .

" Filmfan! Filmfan! . . . " he interrupted himself almost inaudibly, as a shadow on the skylight brought him back with a sudden start to earth. What—who was it? He quivered. He assumed his marble pose. The Indian shawl held motionless as though of metal. His eyes were empty glass, but those eyes missed nothing.

A cat sprawling over the skylight not six feet above his head caused the shadow. But the same flashing glance told him also that this cat was Gilderoy.

Now, in a sense, he had forgotten all about Gilderoy. For an hour or so he had been thinking of other things. Gilderoy's sudden reappearance, therefore, caused him a certain shock. But this shock did not affect his caution. He remained instinctively immobile—a marble

parrot perched incongruously on a bundle of walking-sticks and umbrellas in a chilly loft. He noticed, none the less, that Gilderoy sprawled. His torn ears spread like sails to catch the wind; his hot breath stained with icy glass; his legs were extended gracelessly; his tail formed, as it were, a question mark.

"Hullo, Birdie!" the cat communicated, briefly, obviously a bit above himself. "Here's something!"

There was a sound of hard things dropping on the floor, rolling a little, then coming to a stop. Gilderoy seemed to be letting something fall out of his mouth—a strange proceeding, Dudley thought, for it certainly was not teeth. He wondered, maintaining nevertheless his marble attitude. The cat, at any rate, he noted, was alone.

"*Modus vivendi*," he muttered in his lowest whisper—then saw that Gilderoy had vanished. "Filmfanwhathodudley!" he added louder then, finding his courage. The skylight, however, was clear again, and that slithery sound was Gilderoy landing on the lead after his slippery descent, fresh from one conquest, eager for the next.

The parrot waited cautiously some minutes, then allowed curiosity its way. These things the cat had dropped, what were they? They had fallen with a short, sharp plop, then rattled away and come to rest.

"Your things not mine!" he mumbled to himself, then, awkardly, descended from his brollies to explore. The darkness hampered him at first, accustomed though he was to the gloom

of impenetrable jungles. He sidled slowly across the floor, past the carpets and the perambulator, giving the gun-cases a wide berth instinctively. His natural abilities helped him, his lowered mandibles soon found one of the dropped objects —a nut, by god, a nut.

"*Experentia docet*," he gurgled philosophically, examining it. The voice was the Head Gardener's voice when he named some rare flower with a certain thick uncertainty.

But the nut was good, and Dudley promptly dealt with it. The next one he found was even better, the third, the fourth quite eatable. He found a fifth and, after a long crawling search, a sixth. A seventh came his way while he was waddling back again to find his perch, for his foot stumbled against it. He guzzled it down. Having trailed the shawl after him during the long search, he had difficulty in re-adjusting it when at last he climbed back upon his umbrellas. The golden fringe caught in his feet, the folds slipped sideways, and it was only by dint of picking large holes in it with his beak that he eventually contrived to steady himself finally upon his perch with the shawl comfortably about his slanting shoulders. He did contrive it, however. His head now peeped through quite a large hole his beak had made.

"*Requiescatinpace* dudley," he gabbled, heaving a deep sign as he successfully swallowed the last hard bit of nut. There was no sign of gratitude to Gilderoy for having brought him food. A thought of the cat did, indeed, pass through his

mind, but it was a harsh one rather. "He's never been young, never been a kitten," crossed his brain, as he sat facing the perambulator once more. "He was born as he now is. Never was he a soft, fluffy, playful little ball!" And he composed himself, his tummy now pleasantly filled, to meet what the remainder of the night might bring.

It brought, next at any rate, an audible renewal of the orgy on the tiles, to which Dudley listened as before, with resignation.

"When Dudley listens," he remembered proudly, "there's not much Dudley doesn't hear!"

Yet what he now listened to affected him curiously, penetrating to the deepest recesses of his complex being. This music of triumphant love disturbed him profoundly, as it had disturbed him a few nights ago. It was a strange, mysterious business. It shook him, so that the small feather on his spine stood up and trembled. His tail feathers also shook. He was perplexed and troubled. The problem of his own sex gripped him. Why, he asked himself, should the roar of others making love afflict his calm? Why should his pulses quicken to this chorus screaming vows of eternal adoration to the London moon? Why did his blood run faster, his temperature rise? Why did his heart strain a little, his eyes grow moist?

He found no immediate answer. He shifted his position, perhaps because the metal ribs of the umbrellas were cold to his feet; possibly with

knowledge, he assumed an unusual posture, his head turned sideways and backwards, his unsupported leg—he balanced now on one—hanging in mid-air. It was, actually, a Yogi posture, and a true Yogi posture, he well knew, affected the life-currents of the body in an unusual way. It caused unusual thoughts to rise, and this induced an increase of consciousness that brought unusual knowledge.

Being thus in unusual conditions, in an unusual posture, he realised that something unusual and new might come to him. This reflection pleased him. He might get an inspiration . . . about his sex . . . about his Work. . . .

He fell to dreaming, but first reviewed this conclusion and found it absolutely sound.

"It holds water, Dudley," he whispered to himself, "and the bung is in."

He chuckled, he sighed, then chuckled again, and presently the chuckle passed into laughter, a soft, delicious, cathartic laughter that was both musical and sad. There was a drip of tears behind it though as yet of tears unshed. Akin to the laughter that the gods must know, of the kind that is surely heard in heaven by the angels and by them noted down in the Book of Brave Deeds by Those Who Faced the Music.

Behind it, as Dudley caught the high, hot voices on the tiles, he caught also the murmur of a greater music, deep, terribly deep within himself. The two became inextricably mingled, interwoven. A yearning sadness swept his little body like a tempest. Passing over his small

heroic heart, its searing flame scorched h inmost life. He knew a poignancy that was almost more than he could bear.

A burning tear oozed out of each eye, slipped their salt way down the well-oiled feathers of the heaving breast, and fell with a tiny splash upon the dirty floor.

"*Sunt lacrymae rerum*," murmured the Grey King Parrot, gazing through a blur at the perambulator facing him. Then, closing his eyes, he retired into his secret world where the purple dreams held sway.

These dreams have been referred to before; there is no need to describe them again in detail. They lie, actually, beyond the reach of accurate description. Sometimes, however, a particular dream would be coloured, dominated, by a particular emotion that seemed its key-note. The key-note now, induced doubtless by the faint chorus on the tiles, was Companionship.

Of joyous companionship the parrot dreamed, a single companionship; of gay adventure that was a single adventure; of what Gilderoy called perhaps Loose Moments, yet of a single great Loose Moment with a Perfect Pal . . . . He dreamed, finally, of eggs, but actually of one egg only—of a single, magnificent and perfect EGG.

His dream, as ever, was wafted to him by a scented wind across the forests of a gorgeous world whose note was liberty, the liberty of unclipped wings, of sun-warmed nuts in superabundance, of sparkling pools that reflected his own adorable face and the brilliant feathers of

his radiant mate. The riot of happiness was turned regal by a scorching sun. Like the Just Man of legend, the K.G.P. came into his own.

If the key-note of his blissful dream was companionship, its climax was certainly this single and magnificent EGG. And a strange thing happened then. A flash of blinding knowledge came mysteriously—the lucidity of the clairvoyant that reveals the truth in trance. It blazed upon him. In the higher consciousness of which the soul is free in dreams, he became aware, with startling suddenness, that the summit of achievement towards which his whole long life had tended, towards which all his great energies had unwittingly shaped themselves, was nothing more or less than this subline creative act—the production, the laying, of this perfect Egg.

He saw, he knew, he understood at last. To this end all his laborious hours had plainly led; his study, listening, suffering, thought; his days of patient silence, his months of steady imitation, his hundred years of bitter imprisonment behind bars, his penances and pains that denied him his natural liberty of air—all this devoted and self-sacrificing effort had meant one thing, and one thing only. His Work in life was creative. It was the production of an EGG.

In the visions of the night this flashed upon his inner consciousness with divine lucidity.

Here, in this dis-used loft, beneath the London moon, amid the neglect and dust of stored paraphernalia belonging to people probably long since

dead, their debts unpaid, their very names forgotten, people who had muddled through life without discerning its clear meaning, who had doubtless loved the wrong individual, spent years in accumulating things they did not need (he glanced about him)—in this chilly attic, warmed only by an Indian shawl belonging to a Frump downstairs who was robbed day and night by dishonest and dirty servants—in this frowsy, smelly corner of the enormous Universe, Dudley, K.G.P. red-tailed exile, of unknown age, of questionable sex, of secret birth and forgotten parentage, accepted his Great Mission in the wilderness of the London tiles. . . .

And the inward core of his being trembled with its joy.

It was a sound, at length, that disturbed the revelation in his soul, causing the reflection mirrored in its crystal depths to blur, waver,then disappear. He dived after it wildly, but in vain. The Dream shot instantly away, plunging from memory into the limbo of forgotten things. It completely vanished. He could not recover more than the radiant knowledge that it *had* been there. Its nature now entirely escaped him, and when he woke a moment later he was unable to retain his dream illumination.

The knowledge of his Mission lay henceforth dormant, yet powerfully active in its effect upon him, though unrecognised and unacknowledged. It influenced subconsciously all his subsequent life.

The sound that had disturbed him, on the other

hand, continued. It was a familiar sound—a "purrr-miaow." Gilderoy's face, considerably puffed, glowered down upon him through the skylight. "I'm all in," the cat conveyed bluntly. His whiskers twitched. He licked his weary chops. He made sharp, nervous sideways movements. "They've gone," he intimated, "every one of 'em. And it's time we went, too. I'll take you."

He drew himself up and waited, making curious low sounds that were half growl, half purr. He was obviously exhausted. And Dudley, watching him, felt his mind a blank at first. The transition was too abrupt to manage quite. From some heavenly dream, though it was forgttten now, he seemed to have dropped through endless space to find himself staring at this common, ugly, red-haired, torn-eared cat. The patched eye met his own puzzled glance. "I love him," gabbled the parrot, hideous though he is, faithful, clever Gilderoy!"

His eye wandered to the perambulator, as though somehow it attracted him. A faint delicious shiver of some inexpressible emotion whose source he did not recognise made him tremble. His tiny breast feathers tickled. An ecstasy entered his feet, then ran like lightning through his exquisitely-shaped body till his slim outline quivered. But its origin, lost in the vision of the night, escaped him.

"Hurry up!" growled Gilderoy from above. "I'm fed up, I told you."

"Only the frightened hurry," replied Dudley,

slowly beginning his descent from the umbrellas. He looked, in his black and gold shawl, like a grand seigneur who sweeps his cloak about him. As he scrabbled down, he struck attitudes, as though he hitched a sword and gave a pull to great riding-boots on mud-splashed legs. Actually, of course, he stumbled merely, finding the shawl a difficulty. At length, glancing down his beak with an expression of curiously mingled yearning and regret at the Pimlico loft below him, he climbed laboriously up the hanging cord. He dragged the Indian shawl behind him on one claw. He felt both exhilarated and sad. A velvet paw helped him through the broken pane. A moment later he stood on the roof and looked about him.

CHAPTER XIX

Without doubt there is no other bird better fitted to take the position of friend and companion to man than a Grey Parrot.—W. T. GREENE.

Cats, in the understanding of mechanical appliances . . . attain a higher level of intelligence than any other animals, except monkeys and perhaps elephants.
G. J. ROMANES. *Animal Intelligence.*

A DESERTED world he had already seen once met his view. There was no sound, no movement. The wind had dropped. The moon had set. To ordinary human eyes there was not much, perhaps, to see, but to the parrot's keen sight there was plenty of interest and significance. The chimney-pots rose black as iron against the paling stars; there was a throng of stacks, aerial poles, wires of all sorts, towers, a church steeple here and there, spires of various shapes and kinds, all of which in the dimness gave almost the impression of a forest. It was a weird and eerie world he stared at. Dawn was stealing up, for the eastern sky showed faintly red, though clouds were massed in the west. The cold air nipped. The bird shivered, drawing

the shawl more closely about his sensitive body.

Gilderoy, paying no attention to him, was washing himself at the moment as though he were in some comfortable drawing-room, and Dudley knew better than to disturb him. After the night orgies the cat was not quite himself, not his best self at any rate. Dudley would do nothing to irritate him; he would wait patiently till his friend made a suggestion, or until the cold became more than he could really bear. The scene, meanwhile, absorbed him, the dim beauty moved him; there was a tang of wonder everywhere and the clean air tasted good. There seemed something in his soul that kept him warm-ish, something new, it seemed, that made him happy whatever the conditions, some hot, throbbing, burning secret, though he knew not what it was.

He sniffed the night audibly. The cat stopped his washing, kept a hind leg in the air, and stared.

"Hop on!" he said brusquely, but not unkindly, and lowered his weary back. And Dudley hopped. He made himself as light as possible. Gilderoy gathered up in his mouth loose ends of the shawl that were not round the bird's back and shoulders. "Don't tickle!" he reminded him thickly, and they started. With lowered head, elongated body, and sensitive feet that picked the way with marvellous cleverness in the darkness, the cat shot along the tiles and slates, edging deep awful chasms with unerring balance, skirting high walls, passing the lips of precipices above gulfs of empty blackness. He made no

mistakes, but the pace was moderate, for, thank heaven, the parrot realised, he was tired. He kept his tail up like a ramrod in case his friend might need its support.

"Tail's up," he informed him once, but Dudley balanced beautifully, and did not touch it.

"Quaite," he replied politely.

They raced along, taking sharp corners neatly.

That wondrous journey beneath the fading stars! The bird felt no fear. It all seemed glorified because something in his own heart was glorified. As the light came slowly over the horizon, it was almost as if something, someone, came with it, drawing closer, ever closer, for himself. Poor old Greene! How little that professor knew about parrots, after all!

"Don't prick!" the cat reminded him, with a sharp turn of the head.

"Sorry, reely sorry, pardon!" muttered Dudley in reply, then, having started, went on with "Oh, hell *absit omen* can't come in I'm dressing."

Gilderoy made no comment, but continued the journey across the roofs with faultless instinct, while the bird admired and adored him, his heart charged with this strange new happiness. The cat had been faithful, protective, clever, and Dudley continued to mumble to himself about it in a confused, low tone. He might do so now to his heart's content, it seemed, for the world was asleep, and no listening ears were cocked.

One pair of ears, however, *was* cocked—human

ears. The creatures were passing the small attic window where the student, bearded and bespectacled, still sat working into the small hours at his lamplit table. The window stood wide open, showing the bent head and face, a wet towel round the forehead, books and papers piled beside him, and a pot of black coffee by his hand.

Pleased with the bushy face, which he remembered, and of which he just caught a glimpse as he was borne swiftly past, Dudley greeted it with a little word:

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" he cried loudly into the stillness. As usual, it was not quite the authentic cry, though the imitation was accurate enough to deceive the unwary.

It deceived the worker evidently. The man lifted his face, started to his feet, and came to the window with a sudden spring, cupping both ears with his hands and listening. He gazed and peered across the roofs.

"There it is again—I swear!" came in startled tones.

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" shouted Dudley, pleased with the attention and imitating the call this time perfectly.

Though the shadow was already behind them, Dudley had time to see the man staring excitedly into the darkness, shading his eyes with his arm, but finding nothing, of course, to explain the call. Then Gilderoy turned a chimney and the scene was hidden. Dudley never knew that his friendly greeting was responsible later for a violent orni-

thilogical controversy in a newspaper, lasting for weeks, that a cuckoo on the London tiles in early March was the subject of it, and that the man who originated it was politely called a liar. He never knew all this. What he did know was that Gilderoy just now was angry.

"Stop that noise!" the cat spat viciously. "Keep quiet!"

He was more than snappy about it, the bird realised; he was angry.

Dudley, too happy to quarrel, avoided trouble in the usual way, by changing the conversation. He used Colonelsirsrthur's voice: "There's a depression about in the Atlantic," he gabbled, "damn it," and went on in a confused mutter with something about "it's filling up" and "bright periods." But he kept his voice extremely low, and the cat said no more.

They made the rest of the journey without mishap or further incident, the Indian shawl trailing behind them like the skirts of night that drew a few stars with it as it dipped towards the horizon. And at length Gilderoy stopped, sloping his back so that the parrot might dismount more easily. They were beside an open window. Behind them the dawn was swiftly growing. Waddling across the sill, Dudley reached a table that stood close inside a pleasant room, and on this table was a cage. It contained, he saw, a perch, a receptacle for seed and another for water, both well filled. The journey had been rather a long one, but they had reached a home of sorts at last. Liking the appearance of what

he saw, dim though the light was, he climbed up on the table and approached the cage. The little door stood open. After staring for some minutes with no expression in his eyes, he approved what offered. With the mien and gesture of an Emperor who moves into his own Palace, yet prefers to move sideways for some reason connected with the imperial legs, Dudley waddled further. He entered the cage. The shawl slipped from his shoulders as he did so, and fell in a heap upon the ground.

"Goodbye for the present," mumbled the bird, and advanced to the seed and water, making a good meal without further delay.

Gilderoy, still on the window sill, shaking the moisture from each paw in turn with rapid, quivering jerks, watched him intently, then leaped across and landed on the table. He said nothing, but he inserted a paw quietly between the bars close to his friend's busy beak. It lay there motionless for some time, until Dudley, lifting his head in the act of swallowing, observed it. He stared hard at it, hanging his face sideways. Then he lowered his great mandibles and kissed it. Gilderoy withdrew his paw, uttering a gentle "purrr-miaow," closed the door of the cage, sprang to the linoleum floor and crossed over to the saucer of milk that lay beside a basket. Without hesitating, he lapped up the milk to the last drop, then entered the basket, curled up in a ball and fell sound asleep.

No word passed between the two adventurers. Dudley, using beak and claws, climbed up the

bars and in time arrived at the mathematical centre of the perch. Tucking his head backwards among the warm feathers of his spine, he, too, closed his eyes. His mind and heart were fully charged, his tummy too. His toes moved slightly, as he clasped the perch. He was aware of a pain somewhere in his middle. He heaved a short sigh. He fell asleep to dream of some undiscovered mission that his Work involved, yet that in waking consciousness hid mysteriously just beyond the edge of actual recognition.

CHAPTER XX

One will suddenly give utterance to some word or phrase it has heard a long time previously, and the feat is considered something wonderful; whereas it had, in silence, been studying it all the time.

W. T. GREENE.

THE sleep of exhaustion, it seems, fell then upon both ruffians, for the next thing either of them knew was a cry from the gin-flavoured voice of Mrs. Dibbs. It was early morning. The woman was addressing herself *via* the diety:

"Gawd bless me soul!"

She approached the cage cautiously and stared into it. Seeing the Indian shawl lying in a heap on the floor, she gathered it up with eyes popping out of her head. She examined it, breathing heavily.

"So 'elp me Gawd!" she gasped again. "And torn to ribbons!"

She gazed from the shawl to the cage and from the cage to the shawl in blank amazement, wiping both hands, first on the shawl, then on her dirty apron. "I declare I thought I'd got 'em!" she exclaimed, giving a sharp sigh of relief. "I 'ave, too, praps!" she added, passing the shawl like a towel over her face and eyes. Then, tossing it aside on to the dresser, she swung round, planted her feet solidly, stuck her arms akimbo, and stared with challenge at the occupant of the cage.

Dudley returned her stare with one eye which was as void of expression as a glass bead. His waking mood was a benevolent one, he felt happy still. One leg was tucked up among his warm tummy feathers. He remained motionless as stone in the mathematical centre of his perch. The only hint that he was conscious of the woman's presence was a faint sniff borrowed from the Muddlepuddle butler. This sniff was due to the aroma that emanated from her person, an aroma he disliked, aware that it was caused by matter in the wrong place. No other sound, no movement of any sort, escaped him. The instant he woke he had decided upon his attidude: the *rigor mortis* of marble or ironstone was the stuff for him.

"And the other blighter, too!" snorted Mrs. Dibbs, as, feeling something rubbing against her boot, she glanced down and saw Gilderoy, tail erect, legs doing a slow concentrated goose-step to and fro, her face softened slightly, but her forehead became corrugated, her breath irregular.

"The devil's in them both!" she said under her breath, "or else I'm dreamin' drunk! 'Ow did they get out? 'Or did they get in again? Where've they been to all night?" She thought hard a moment. "The winder was open, of course, but that bird—'e'd just've frozen stiff!" She thought again, wiping her apron across her

nose and lips. "The shawl" she exclaimed, as though an idea struck her, though not an idea she could accept, for she shook her head. "Anyhow," she concluded, "it's his beak made those tearin' holes, that's certain." Instinctively she glanced down at her own grimey fingers.

She interrupted the soliliquoy to pour out some milk into the cat's saucer, and while she turned back and stooped, Dudley allowed himself a brief comment in the interval. "Your things, not mine," he gabbled, but in a tone too low for her to hear, it seemed. Gilderoy's "purrr-miaow-ing," while he tried to get his nose into the milk pouring from the spout, also helped to drown the words. Yet Dudley, oddly enough, felt no bitterness towards her. He was too happy for recrimination. Kindness to all the world glowed, apparently, in his little breast.

A high-pitched yell came down the passage from a distant room.

"Comin', Mum, comin'!" shouted Mrs. Dibbs, pouring the last drops from the jug on to Gilderoy's head and neck, already in the saucer. She straightened up, hurriedly stuffed the shawl into a drawer, then arranged the tray of morning tea. Taking a good sip to see that it tasted all right, she went flumping down the corridor.

The two scoundrels, left to themselves, exchanged a silent greeting, though neither looked at the other. Gilderoy stopped lapping a moment to watch the woman go out, his head turned away from the parrot. But his greeting was ummistakeable.

"Been Working?"

There was obviously no answer to this, no answer one could give to an inferior, at any rate. Dudley maintained his *rigor mortis*. The strange new sweetness in him, however, softened his usual dignity. Staring imperturbably straight before him as before, he retired behind his beak, thinking his own vast thoughts. An angelic look, the sweetness of honey in it, stole upon his face. Joy coursed through his veins like perfumed fire. He knew something that he did not know. This curious, selfless joy, could it be perhaps, he asked himself, a maternal joy?

Voices came floating down the passage:

" . . . yes, 'e's back, Mum . . . come back in the night."

"At *this* hour! How much is it? Say I'm out . . . !"

"The parrot, Mum, I mean. Not a bill. And that friendly, too! In 'is caige, as good as gold . . . !"

A door banged, cutting off further speech, but a sound of telephoning became audible. The creatures now knew a Trunk Call when they heard it. Dudley's marvellous hearing caught not only Mrs. de Mumbles' high-pitched yells, but the distant answering voice as well, although a corridor and a closed door intervened.

"Awleyawleyawley," he muttered gently.

Gilderoy understood. His milk finished, he landed with a soundless spring on the table and began to wash himself beside the cage. Tiny drops of milk hung to his whiskers still. The

intelligence of the pair, due to London life, was still above the normal. They exchanged ideas with perfect ease.

"Ready when you are," offered Dudley briefly. Hawley, they knew, had been telephoned to. He would arrive shortly.

Gilderoy, shaking the last drops from his whiskers, suggested that, after all, he preferred the country milk. He, too, would go home.

"I," mentioned Dudley, "shall be taken—carried," he added, to make clear that it would be no trouble to himself. "My own big cage, of course." He chuckled slightly.

The observation, if superior, was not unkindly. If the cat wished to go back he would have to walk it on his four flat feet. The bird merely wished to intimate the facts. Cats, he knew, had often walked across half of England to a former house.

Gilderoy, now couchant like a miniature sphinx, staring over at the tiles, let five minutes pass.

"I always land on my feet," his soft purr announced at last. "Four," he underlined. "Not clipped either!"

Something tense was in the air. Dudley changed the conversation. He saw that his pal suffered from what colonelsirarthur called a "hang-over."

"*Igitur*," he said in a voice sweet as a little bell, "wotabahtit? Finemorningpolly!"

He marched over to his seed box and began to feed, while Gilderoy sat and watched him. Only

an inch or two lay between their heads. Anyone seeing them would have seen merely a parrot eating his seed and a rather somnolent, quiet cat. Actually, however, they were talking hard. There was no sound, there was very little movement; gesture and attitude contrived the exchange between them, the poise of head and beak, the angle of puffed cheeks and blunt black muzzle.

They knew exactly, none better, what was going to happen presently.

"Muddlepuddle again," from Dudley.

"Agreed," from Gilderoy. "I'm glad."

"Molly."

"Field mice."

"You've enjoyed our trip," from Dudley.

"You haven't," from Gilderoy.

"Tiles!" with a glint of contemptuous pity in the eye.

"Male or female?" with a grin.

"Despisery," a few minutes later, from the centre of the perch.

"A mate's a mate," from the basket, where the cat had curled up half-an-hour ago.

It went onanonanonanonanon, this exchange of comments, while behind it both creatures observed the preparations that were going on for their removal—for Dudley's removal, at any rate. But Dudley retired from the conversation after a while, finding it unstimulating. Other, deeper things were busy in him, though he couldn't define them exactly, couldn't get at them anyhow. His ruminations became profound and mysterious, dealing with two big issues—his

imminent departure, and the imminent consummation of his Work. The two whizzed and thundered through his mind side by side, for His Departure was coloured by his Secret, the Thing he did know by the Thing he did not know.

The new Joy pierced and trembled through all he now did and thought, fluttering its sparkling wings. It seemed impossible to keep it hidden. The very attitude of back and sloping shoulders, the poise of head and neck, the lie of the feathers, curve of the dainty tummy, tension of tender legs and gripping toes, all these betrayed this new-found Happiness that, established in the mathematical centre of the King Grey Parrot's being, radiated thence in all directions. The queer new pain was there as well.

Even being taken home in a cage, now held a flavour of some stately and significant kind. All hint of the ignominious had vanished. He was no longer being "taken," he was "leaving." He had transmuted, as with bad language, what was ugly. His Departure would be a Procession, a Ceremonial, a Performance with a Cosmic Meaning. It was to be interpreted in an initiatory sense, leading to an ultimate Creative Climax.

If he could not define this Climax yet, that was only natural, after all. To know any one thing fully, one must know everything, and time obviously failed him there. Yet the creative fire was at work in his mysterious depths. That at least he knew. Odd fugitive hints reached his mind.

Thus, doubtless, a great Genius who is later to shake the world, may catch the divine call afar even among the hardships of his difficult youth; though unable to interpret it, he is aware of a faint ghostly instinct—prophetic assurance, as it were—that all will eventually be well with him.

How should he not feel joy! How should even the lowest intelligence not recognise a new splendour in his presence! How should the truth not radiate its fierce internal fire!

"My luffeley birdie!" Mrs. Dibbs kept repeating, safely several feet away, "so you're goin' back 'ome again, are you? Leavin' us when you've only just 'ardly come! A shime I call it!" There was no real love in the voice, but there was, perhaps, a little faint extra touch of friendliness. She recognised the bright new grandeur.

"Can't come in," said the bird sweetly. "Ma! Ma!"

Mrs. de Mumbles, coming into the kitchen at intervals, was similarly affected. "I'd offer to buy you," she declared admiringly, "if I had the money. You're *such* a beauty!" She became unintelligible in her eloquence; the parrot, at least, could not follow it, though it must be added that he wasn't listening. She was deeply moved, at any rate, by something she hardly understood herself. Gilderoy, too, sensitive to every change, was puzzled by something unusual in his familiar friend, something he could not explain, as he explained most things, by attributing it to sex or hunger. He stared by the

half-hour, his tail and torn ear twitching, his patched eye very keen. So bright were his eyes they seemed to tear his face.

Then, while the morning passed, and the creatures, as before, waited for a bell, the King Grey Parrot, unable to suppress his emotion, burst suddenly into rapturous song. He had often whistled; he now sang. His heart poured forth in a flood of glorious music:

"Swineswineawley . . . nildesperandumbloody-nonsensehell . . . pollynullussecundusgod bless-younisiprius . . . blastyergizzard . . . homeplease-james . . . arcadesambodamn . . . populusque-romanussisicnonvobis . . . gilderoygilderoy-gilder-*roy*. . . ."

The music filled the dreary earthly kitchen with its splendour, making the passage echo. Nothing could stop the flow that poured from this great little bursting heart, brimming over with this mysterious new happiness. Thus, doubtless, the morning stars made the empyrean echo with their paean of creation No lesser inspiration urged Dudley now.

"Oh, stop that frightful noise!" yelled a screeching voice from Mrs. de Mumbles' bedroom. "What's the matter? Stop it, I say, stop it! I can't hear myself telephone!"

"Cut it out, you blighter!" cried Mrs. Dibbs, flapping her dirty apron at the cage. "Shut yer mouth, will you, you damned parrot!"

Gilderoy, alone showing no interest, slept on calmly in his basket.

In the middle of which the door-bell rang, and

Mr. Hawley, cage and all, was admitted on his second visit.

The conversation, being uninteresting and therefore ignored by both bird and cat, is unrecorded; only the action mattered. Mr. Hawley, Mrs. de Mumbles and Mrs. Dibbs all talked at once, and chiefly about the parrot's mysterious disappearance the night before. Compliments were exchanged, while each of the three said a good deal about the trouble they had been severally put to, adding apologies and regrets. Money, too, slipped about, coming to rest finally in menial hands. To all of which Dudley paid little attention.

His loss of Liberty was involved. It was an occasion to tax all available sources of soul and character. Pride, vanity, self-respect and dignity would be severely tested. Only the greatest could survive such an ordeal without ignominy, without appearing ridiculous. To be carried out by an underling, a helpless captive in a cage, a captive treated with condescending kindness, obliged to listen to foolish phrases in affected voices—to suffer this, and at the same time maintain one's native grandeur, was a task few could hope to manage, much less master.

Dudley, K.G.P., did both. He met the situation with a kind of feathery *aplomb*, light, yet stately. There was neither fuss nor flutter. To accept an inevitable fate without resistance was, he knew, the secret of dignity, the martyr's secret. He introduced into his attitude the cosmic note—majestic grandeur.

With the leisurely ease of a star that sets into the summer sea, he descended from his perch at Hawley's bidding. He crossed the floor of the little cage he now left, as of the big one he now entered, with the steady motion of the cedar's shadow that creeps along the lawn. He ascended the old familiar perch with the unhurried calm of the moon that climbs the heavens irresistibly, conscious that nothing can prevent. Sideways along his perch, he then crawled with the imperceptible yet uninterrupted advance of dusk, when night draws her veil over the tired landscape. And these cosmic similies are true, because he himself felt cosmic.

With resignation he gazed into Awley's spotty face of yellowish wax, as a star, a universe, just created, looks into God's great face with a quiet "thank you!" Only, knowing that Awley was no deity, he used another phrase than this. "Goddam Dudley," he said beneath his breath, and "Molly."

"There's a good Dudley! There's a brave fellow!" Hawley tried in vain to hasten his speed. "He *would* run away from 'is nice home would he? But he'll be glad to get back again, or I don't know nothing about parrots! Put your best leg forward now . . . !"

He did not venture, however, to assist in any way; he kept his fingers well out of reach; he no more dared to push the bird than a nursemaid would dare to try and push the earth round faster.

"Step along, my birdie!" contributed Mrs.

Dibbs. "Show us what you can do!" She coaxed and wheedled.

"For god's sake be quick," put in Mrs. de Mumbles. "I've got a Lunch at one o'clock."

Heavenly bodies may be neither coaxed nor wheedled; they know their most becoming gait and stick to it.

"Slow mover, ain't he, Mr. 'Awley?"

"He can move when he wants to, right enough," replied the second man. He would permit no slighting remarks about his property. He closed the door with a click.

Dudley looked down his beak, his claws holding the familiar home-perch with satisfaction. "I leave. I am not turned out!" he gabbled very low. He saw the kitchen for the last time. He saw the basket, too. He saw that it was—empty. Gilderoy had disappeared again, and—again—no one had seen him go!

"*Non est*," murmured the parrot, upset by the discovery.

The home-cloth was arranged carefully over the cage, the cage was swung to the floor, then carried slowly down the passage, followed by a procession of worshippers that was merely an earnest of what the ceremonial should have been. Three human voices chanted praise. Through a slit in the cloth, Dudley saw the drawing-room as he passed.

"A bit Maple-ish . . . !" he remarked, in her ladyship's voice.

"'ear him talking to himself, Mum," said the second man proudly. "That means 'e's happy."

"We've taken the greatest possible care of the bird," Mrs. de Mumbles mentioned stiffly.

"Oh, I know, mum," put in Hawley quickly, "and 'er ladyship wished me to thank you partickler for all the trouble given. He's a valuable bird, of course."

It was half way through this bit of chat that Dudley noticed a grimy finger laid upon his cloth. He took no action at the moment, however. He laid a little plan, perhaps, no more than that.

"Gilder-*roy*! Gilder-*roy*!" he shrieked, and the owner of the finger automatically moved it, the hand it belonged to pulling the cloth more tightly over the cage. This instinctive action placed the finger a fraction of an inch between the bars. Dudley seized it and bit it passionately. "At last!" he thought with satisfaction.

The uproar that followed did not interest him beyond the fact that it drowned his own penetrating shriek. He stopped shouting "Gilder-*roy*!" therefore, and took a peep through his cloth instead. The procession, he saw, was now on the landing at the top of the stairs, the front door being slowly closed behind them.

"First to the ri' and second to the le'," he offered, but his voice was inaudible in the uproar. He distinguished the noisy words with difficulty, but he caught what Hawley was saying: "Hold your row, can't you! Stop that blasted screaming! You'll find 'im when we get home. Hold that row!" Also a word or two of what Mrs. Dibbs was saying — two words only, to be exact: "Damages . . . damages. . . ." Mrs. de Mum-

bles, though screaming, used no actual words apparently. And the front-door banged behind him

The second man, wise in his generation, had been quick. His own finger had not been touched. Mr. Hawley, pretending he didn't know that had happened, was down the stairs and in the street before the noise of the banging door had even time to echo.

Closing his eyes as they stepped into a waiting taxi, Dudley turned his thoughts on heaven. They left Pimlico behind them. Mildew Place was gone. He gave also a thought, and a loving one, to vanished Gilderoy.

CHAPTER XXI

The most untamable of the carnivora is the panther; the most destructive is the cougar; the gentlest is the leopard; the most intelligent is the cat. . . . She never parts with her liberty. She will be neither our servant nor our friend.—M. Fee.

Études philosophiques sur l'instinct et l'intelligence des animaux.

TO Gilderoy, it must now be conceded frankly, full justice has not been done. In this little memo on the psychology of cat and parrot, a note which may prove of value some day to serious students of Natural History, it must be apparent that the biped has received more attention than the quadruped. Gilderoy, seen of course, through Dudley's eyes, has received rather scant notice. The major interest has centred somehow on the red-tailed Grey King Parrot; the scraggy feline with the patched eye has played a subsidiary role.

There is, of course, a reason for this, and a hint of it may be found in the title. To Molly, as she took down the story in dictation from his beak, he gave his permission indeed, yet with a proviso. There was an emphatic "But." "If

I'm to be used at all," he insisted, "I must be in capitals."

This was a *sine qua non*, and the condition, thus laid down, has been literally adhered to. Molly obeyed the letter of the contract. If DUDLEY has bulked, while *Gilderoy* has slinked through this record, the reason lies in the former's adamantine attitude on this point.

It is obvious that the cat has been neglected, his motives mis-read, his actions mis-interpreted, the mysterious splendour of his ancient and inscrutable soul barely hinted at. He has been underrated. Yes, all this, alas, is evident. At the same time, a contract is a contract, and Molly had an author's conscience. Her attempts to modify the terms of the parrot's permission, to go deeper into the cat's character, to put more fat upon his almost visible bones, met with no encouragement. He was unyielding. Material, Dudley insisted, decrees its own best form of expression, and form was of vital importance. He *did* bulk; Capitals were, therefore, right. And all discussions about it ended invariably with an emphatic "*stet*."

Dudley, too, however, possessed a conscience; and his new Happiness increased its sensitiveness. Nobility, generosity, came uppermost. And now, on his journey with 'awley back to Muddlepuddle, he realized that Gilderoy had been neglected. He saw in restrospect all the cat had done, his faithfulness, his help, his protection. He saw that empty basket in the kitchen. He missed his pal; he needed him; he felt lonely.

Gilderoy ought to be more in the picture, yes. Well, in future, he should be. Gilderoy, on the lowest ground, provided contrast, and if he bulked a little bigger, Dudley himself would gain by bulking bigger still.

Having once seen this clearly, his generosity never wavered. At the end of almost everything he uttered from this moment, he tacked on the name of Gilderoy.

Meanwhile, the train carried himself and Awley from Charing Cross to Kent. The second man had been accepted as personal attendant; the parrot, therefore, had nothing to bother about as regards luggage, ticket, time of train or choice of class. His man saw to all these things. An empty Third Class Smoker was selected. Giving his man a grave, but yet a courtly glance, he then dismissed him from his thought, holding that familiarity with servants was a mistake. Hawley retired behind his sporting paper, having first closed both windows and opened the door of the cage. The bird was thus undisturbed in mind. He remained on his perch, mastered the nasty pipe-tobacco by ignoring it, and thought hard about his missing pal.

Where was that red-haired Bolshevik? What was he up to? How had he disappeared without being seen? Was he on the tiles again? Awley hadn't even noticed him in the flat, believing him still at Muddlepuddle. His absence had not been remarked upon. He wasn't particularly noticeable, anyhow, unless you got the patched eye full in the face. Dudley missed him, for he liked to

see him about. Would he never see him again? How long would it take him to walk down to Kent by road? He wondered, he asked himself a thousand questions about Gilderoy, his *semper fidelis amicus* Gilderoy. No answer came, no acknowledgement from the wireless whiskers. The rhythm of wheels and sleepers, the jolting of the coach, the lilt of telegraph poles as they flashed by with punctuating thuds, these were the sole response. Yet the world itself sang with him. "Gild-er-roy Gild-er-roy Gild-er-roy" woke half of drowsy Kent with its magic rune.

The journey passed pleasantly enough. They reached the station of Muddlepuddle in due course; they drove to the Manorouse in the runabout car; they were met in the hall by her ladyship, by the children, by the dogs, by the French governess, by staring, inquisitive servants who raised their eyebrows and tried to conceal foolish smiles; and Dudley, the cynosure of all eyes, centre of a thousand questions, was borne upstairs as in a triumphal procession to the room he had already occupied for so many years.

Grave, dignified and silent, he stood erect upon his familiar perch. He swayed a trifle as the cage swung to and fro, pushed by the crowding children, but he never lost his balance. He saw the love and worship in Molly's eyes, kissed the hand she put between the bars, placed one claw, toes opening and shutting ecstatically, in her golden hair, and then removed it again. The child said little, almost as little as he did, but he saw the moist excitement in her eyes.

Though his heart was bursting, he exercised his marvellous restraint, for he hated scenes in any case. This, moreover, was a Royal Procession, himself the regal centre, and emotion of slobbery kind was out of place. His glassy stare perceived that the moisture in Molly's eyes now became a definite drop. That was enough. She understood. He understood, too. "Dudley," he said eventually, in a low voice, "Dudley." That splendid name said all that could be said.

Aloof, and every inch a king from beak to toe, he preserved impenetrable silence. Inscutable and majestic mid the turmoil of an inferior world, he cocked his head and merely stared with non-committal benevolence. He loved them all. Lonely upon his perch in Darien, he swam back into their ken. He had Molly. Only Gilderoy was missing from his happiness.

He heard the flood of questions, but ignored them. He was scolded, greeted affectionately, cursed, smothered with endearing terms, asked where he had been, with whom he had stayed, what he had been doing, how he had escaped, who had stolen him, what food and drink, if any, he had received, how he had stood the cold . . . while being called a dozen new names, friendly and otherwise, and subjected to every conceivable form of caress by fingers, hands and voices.

He made no comment, gave no sign of recognition. *Silentio* and *rigor mortis* were his mottoes.

"He's lost his tongue, poor sweetheart!"

"He's tired out, poor bird!"

"His feathers have lost their gloss!"

" He's been treated rough! "

" Starved, frozen, perhaps poisoned! "

" He needs seed and water! "

" And sleep! "

" And warmth! "

" 'e shiver—*le pauvre animal*! "

" Cover his cage and he'll recover by degrees !"

To one comment only did he pay attention—from Molly:

" The darling went to have tea with the King, of course. He can't repeat what the King said to him, the little saint. It was in confidence."

To this he replied, for it was something he *could* reply to:

" Dudleydudleydudley," he said gently, using again his finest phrase.

With the arrival of the seed and water, however, and just as the shawl was being arranged by Molly's loving fingers above the cage, he whispered something in her ear as she bent down: " Goodbye for the present *ab initio* manorouse hell *nuda veritas* Mollymolly Gilderoygilderoy." It was too low even for her hearing, sharpened by affectionate understanding though it was. " Darling," she whispered back, and pinned the shawl as of old.

The room emptied. He waddled towards his meal with the grace and majesty of an emperor who prefers to eat and drink in semi-darkness. Aware of his new splendour, too, he was glad the shawl was spread lest the others, overwhelmed by his glory, might have heart attacks and pass out of existence.

He ate and drank—in moderation. The new music singing in his breast, now warm at last, made all else seem trivial and unimportant. This mysterious Secret in his heart gave him a feeling of significance that dwarfed all else in the world about him. It seemed in his tummy, a trifle low down, he fancied, yet his joy, at any rate, was cosmic. It was related to the Universe. The Great Dream, the London Vision that caused it, was indeed forgotten for the moment, lost to memory, yet its influence remained. He knew himself committed to a Secred Destiny, though he had not discovered what this destiny was. He knew, as he had already phrased it, something that he didn't know. Verb. sap., he reminded himself, and let it go at that.

The King Grey Parrot was deeply moved.

Dusk fell, the stars came out, the familiar friendly walls stood protectively round the cage, the children had gone to bed. Molly, slipping her head inside the door, had peeked at him and said "Good-night, darling, *darling* Dudley! I shan't cry any more now. I *knew* you'd come back. I knew you hand't *really* left me!" Sweet little saint! She was in bare feet and nightgown, her hair hanging in two pig-tails, and he had caught the sound of her feet long before her face appeared. "Cuckoo! Dudleymollydudley!" he had answered her. He felt unbelievably happy and at peace. The old home, after all, was best. Here, in the Manorouse that loved him, was the right place for his Work to realize its consummation. The Climax, whatever it might be, would come in this very room.

It had moved much nearer.

The deeps in him were stirred; the poetry of life began to sing; his mood—*sunt lacrymae rerum*—took its colour from his innermost profundities. That odd, deep-seated pain still throbbed a little.

One by one the lights in the old house were lit, and some hours later they were one by one put out. The Night Wind poked her nose round the corners of the wooded slopes. She brought her sweetest perfume down the sky, her gentlest voice. Her dim feelers caressed the trees and walls. Her low music floated here and there. She was in her softest mood. The parrot was aware of her. "I love her," he responded, "though I've known her warmer."

Alone in the Day Nursery, perched in the darkness, he listened to her million-footed tread. Her voices soothed and blessed him. But for her, he had the room to himself. Only Gilderoy was necessary to make it perfection. He missed Gilderoy. But the queer interior pain was always there. There was this two-fold ache in him. Gilderoy was the kind of pal whose absence leaves a hole. In one's greatest joys and sorrows, the bird discovered, one is inevitably alone. There was this touch of sadness in his Joy. . . .

The night wore on.

He passed the dark, lonely hours in meditation; he had decided he would not sleep—not much, at any rate. Mysterious processes at work in his interior made sleep difficult anyhow; a tough of melancholy rose certainly from his

inmost heart, a melancholy that puzzled him a little, because it seemed somehow inseparable from the happiness he felt. The Night Wind helped him there, the thought of Molly's unalterable love as well. The heart of existence, at any rate, he felt positive, was bliss, whatever physical symptoms might assert to the contrary. He, therefore, ignored the passing hints of the strange, unaccustomed tummy-ache.

His thought—according to Molly, his faithful accurate Boswell—went frightfully deep. His meditation reached finally that rare state where thought stops. He did not think any more at all. He got *behind thought*, where direct knowledge, knowledge of Reality, is said to become first possible. . .

"Little Saint," the child had called him, and the native purity of the childhood heart may have authority. Who dares deny it? The expression on the parrot's face in the gloom was certainly difficult to interpret, but it held a touch of the marvellous, assuredly. To have described it as idiotic, inane, as blank vacancy, would have been a hasty judgment. Purged of all earthly taint, it seemed; fear, lust, desire, vanity, greed, all had vanished, leaving him sweetly rinsed.

The universal admiration of sainthood suggests that saintliness is somehow inexplicably worth while; it pertains, conceivably, to another world where it is, perhaps, the natural state. Nothing experienced in life really satisfies; whence, obviously, we experience wrongly. There must be another way, another method, of experiencing.

To deny that, behind an expression of utter vacancy, the King Grey Parrot perceived all this in his Muddlepuddle Manorouse Meditation is to deny something not clearly formulated, and therefore not arguable.

It was, in any case, 3 a.m. when Dudley reached the exalted state of consciousness where thought stopped. He knew for certain it was 3 a.m., because he distinctly heard the clock in the village church two miles away strike three times. He also knew that the wind had shifted a point or two about this time, because he caught a new sheaf of sounds, soft noises from the wooded hills instead of, as before, from the reedy valleys where the little waters ran. An eye peeped wisely too. He saw a faint red line over those same hills towards the east. This whisper of coming dawn he recognised. Was it not among his earliest recollections?

Yet these little sounds were not the only ones he heard. Something more delicate still stole through the window opened at the top and set his amazing aural nerves aquiver. But if he shivered slightly, it was not the cool dawn air that set his small breast-feathers trembling. It was excitement. The faint sound he caught above the rustling of the trees was one he recognised, mere ghost of a sound, indeed, but unmistakeable. It was the stealthy pad of weary little feet, of four weary little feet, and those feet, he knew positively, were Gilderoy's

Motionless the parrot stood and listened; he listened like a god. Far, far away, down in the

valley where the thick trees provided cover, that tired cat was stealing like a ghost towards the manorouse. Dudley judged the distance, the direction, the very spot indeed, with faultless accuracy. Gilderoy was making his cautious way through the stretch of woods between the railway station and the house. He was moving uphill, for his body was not upright, he was close to the ground, elongated rather, the legs a little bent. The front paws went down tentatively before weight was laid upon them, the hind ones followed more quickly. There were pauses, in which the feet were shaken rapidly in the air to rid themselves of water; sometimes, too, there came swift, sharp rushes, evidently when a clearing in the trees made cover scanty. But no dog barked, no flapping of frightened birds was audible. No twig snapped, no leaf crackled. Gilderoy made his way with all the skill of his consummate feline race.

Like a god the parrot stood and listened, his heart swelling within him. The faint sounds altered slightly, as Gilderoy, emerging from the woods, passed on to more silent grass, the field of course that lay just beyond the back lawn. And Dudley made a further discovery then, drew a deduction rather: the cat was not so very tired after all, certainly not exhausted. It became suddenly clear to the discerning bird that he had not walked from London. The hesitancy among the trees was due to caution, not fatigue.

"Cuckoo!" breathed the parrot swiftly, and turned his attention elsewhere.

He had been listening for some time, evidently, for the sky was brighter now, the stir of the leaves outside a trifle sharper. There was a new scent in the air as well, the tang of breaking day. The dawn-wind slipped in with a little breathless puff and scatter, pirouetting across the lawn. He heard the Night Wind's fluttering farewell, already high among the tinted clouds overhead, as she floated off towards the sea.

He watched all this, remembering his own very youthful days of a century ago, when dawn would break over a slumbering blue ocean and fragrant leagues of forest. Both eyes wide open, he now stared at this coming of the dawn in Kent. His toes moved rhythmically. He was in an ecstasy. The climax of his Destiny, he knew, had moved again much closer. He did not think, he felt. A storm of bliss, as it were, boiled up in him; it was intensified by the knowledge that his pal had not forsaken him, that Gilderoy, the cat with the flat-topped skull, was coming closer, too. This three-fold inspiration, of happy distant dawns, of his Work stealing towards its Climax, of Gilderoy's return, moved him in an unbelievable way. Even the mysterious tummy-ache was momentarily forgotten. He felt himself divine. One with the whole Magical Show, he seemed. His love, his wisdom, merged to form an even greater thing, although he found no name for it just then.

"Henceforth," his angle of head, his expressionless eyes proclaimed, "I shall live like a flower, asking nothing of Life but the sunshine.

I shall let the bees rifle my heart. I shall suffer all and sundry to plunder my wisdom and my love. . . I shall give out . . . !"

One glassy eye, at this moment of glorious exaltation, glanced through the window and fell upon something standing motionless on the lawn—a mournful object and singularly arresting. He looked again. It was—a tree. He received a sudden, curious shock. Sharp and poignant this shock was. An imperceptible shudder ran down his whole body. He caught his breath an instant.

Though the twilight was not yet wholly dissipated, the general outlines of things were now visible, edged with faint, growing light. These objects, of course, were all familiar to him; he had seen them daily for several years. Yet this tree, which also he had seen ten thousand times before, he now noticed more particularly. Abruptly, for some odd reason, it drew, it compelled, his attention. Its body, above all its head, seemed thrust forward at him, as in a cinema close-up. It was almost as if he now saw it for the first time.

It both attracted and repelled him. It held a startling new significance. It stood there, staring at him through the window as only a tree can stare. He returned the stare but with a queer trepidation, and because he could not help himself. He was as if fascinated.

It was tall, but not really big. Strange spikey flowers poked out of its head with a certain violence. They seemed to glare at him, they

conveyed, he felt, a kind of challenge. He was aware of interest, pity, sympathy, of something personal and appealing to himself in the gaze these flowers flung in his face across the lawn. It was a bitter, yet an understanding gaze. Did it also, he asked himself uneasily, suggest something darker, something sinister as well!

Dudley turned his head away, though with an effort, conscious that a sense of chill came creeping about his heart.

Where had he seen this tree before, its like at any rate? Why was it familiar in a way nothing else on the lawn was familiar? Had he not known it long ago, by the dozen, by the hundred, by the thousand? Whence came this haunting suggestion of significance about its outline, its staring spikey flowers, this touch of something mysterious and equivocal about its motionless white face? Why was its gaze, so steady, so penetrating, charged with a pitiful and understanding sympathy, with a meaning intimately personal to himself? He associated it somehow with burning sunshine. Whence came, then, this touch of ice about his spine?

Dudley shivered again a shiver he could not master. His head, turned sideways now, looked past it. He offered the insistent tree a profile of marble that appeared at any rate insusceptible. He ignored it. But his habit of ignoring what he disliked or did not understand was not effective as usual. He could not forget the tree. He could not forget that it stood staring at him through the window.

The altered angle of his head and eye now showed him the room instead of the lawn. The early light just touched the opposite wall. It brought a new object into his field. In the corner, where stood the children's animal toys, the face of Gilderoy was gazing at him fixedly.

CHAPTER XXII

The one animal which has been tolerated, esteemed, and at times worshipped without having a single distinctly desirable quality.—N. S. SHALER.

Domesticated Animals.

DUDLEY, all through his life, had measured distance by flight. He knew no other way. The moment he set eyes on his red-headed pal, therefore, his first reaction was instinctive:

"He hasn't *walked* the whole way!"

This was his first reaction. His second was simply pleasure. He was overjoyed to see the cat. If there was perhaps a further emotion of self-interest, he did not recognize it, did not label it anyhow. The cat, of course, was helpful and protective, but the point was—he was extremely glad to see him. How he had got here was of secondary importance.

This moment of meeting after the anguish of separation being fraught with drama, deep feeling, and the intense relief of long-sustained anxiety, called for suitable recognition. The *mots justes* must be found.

Dudley found them:

"I spy!" he exclaimed aloud.

The cry, in a child's voice, rang through the Day Nursery like a clarion. And, having uttered it, the King Grey Parrot then experienced a reaction of another kind. It came unexpectedly rather, like a douche of cold water. He had

decided that his friend must be more in the picture, more talked about, more seen.

He now suddenly felt otherwise. Of late the parrot had bulked exclusively, his return to the Manorouse of prime importance. Dudley had been the one subject of conversation and interest. But now that Gilderoy was back . . . perhaps. . .?

"You want 'em *when* you want 'em," he reflected, "but who wants anybody *all* the time?"

It was a human, even a super-human reflection. His intelligence, clearly, was still on its highest gear. At top-notch Dudley was until the finish, and all his faculties combined to keep this surprising standard. The London stimulus, his secret Joy, the approach of the Climax were the explanation.

He stared fixedly at the cat, but kept silent, and there was a certain ferocity about his silence. His head was cocked at an angle. His glassy eye, as his whole body, held motionless. The tree, with its ominous suggestion, though not forgotten, slipped into the background for the moment, his queer inner ache as well. It was Gilderoy that filled the landscape.

Having spied him, he now considered him.

The cat had entered the house, the room as well, by means best known to himself. He had chosen a dim corner where he was inconspicuous, and in nobody's way. If anyone arrived, as might happen any moment now, his chances of being kicked downstairs were therefore slight. He sat there doing nothing, not even licking his chops. The expression on his bulging cheeks was

one of satisfaction—with himself. He was a picture and he knew it. At the same time, he was in a mood of intense secretiveness, due to the fact that he had come back all the way from London, and that no one could possibly guess how he managed it. This was his secret, and he kept it to himself. Tight as a drum his mind was. No one—Dudley, least of all—could ever guess.

Meanwhile, what Dudley spied, and now considered was, in his own view—well, not exactly decorative. Gilderoy's rapid arrival was as unexpected as snow in midsummer, yet the quadruped itself had nothing in common with snow. The parrot, betraying no surprise, stared at the awful visage of his friend amid its reddish background. —filthy beyond description. His face was black, his patched eye was smeared with black, the white feet, all four of them, were black, and streaks of black ran in a criss-cross pattern up and down his gingery sides and over his scraggy back. Even his torn ears were picked out in grime. The eyes alone shone brightly and unstained.

Such was the apparition Dudley, the immaculate, now quietly considered. The corner camouflaged it cleverly. It faced him. Behind him, as he knew, the staring tree watched steadily. He didn't forget it, but he ignored it for the moment. Choosing the lesser of two evils, he gazed at Gilderoy.

"I am the cleanest animal in the world," said Gilderoy's attitude plainly. To which Dudley, giving a quiet cough, made no reply. No sound

passed his beak, but behind it, in his generous mind, ran the unspoken thought, "I love him, I love Gilderoy, I know nothing like him."

They stared at one another. The cat was as placid as though there had been no separation, as though the adventurous pair had never left the house at all. He sat calmly beaming into space. His eyeballs blinked. He gazed with the nearest approach to a smile his grotesque features could achieve into his friend's glassy eye. His tigerish grin seemed painted on the air. From time to time he gave a casual tongue-dab to his chest or shoulder-blades, but the idea that he was not spotless did not enter his head. He produced, moreover, the impression that he had always sat where he sat now, in the corner. He had never been away He hugged his delicious secret . . . and a long time passed.

The sun came up and blazed into the room, but the two occupants took no notice of it, though the increased light showed up Gilderoy in all his umkempt horror. They maintained their habit of refusing to consider the obvious, much less comment on it. Dudley was aware that the tree behind him outside seemed to have drawn closer. The sunlight made it stand out more challengingly. He saw its strange aggressive head with the face of glaring spikey flowers that seemed to demand his attention so insistently. In the windless air they hung there motionless, staring, watching, waiting. The bird was aware of this persistent concentration, and disliked it. It made him feel uneasy. Whence came, he again

wondered, the curious sympathy that stirred inside him, the hint of intimate understanding?

He turned his head away—towards ugly Gilderoy again. The point of his consideration was how Gilderoy had travelled down from London. He had walked up from the direction of the station, but he certainly had not footed the thirty-five miles from town. He was filthy, but he was not exhausted.

It was a mysterious business, yet it was his own business. Unless he cared to tell, no one could ever know. A secret is an important joy to a cat and at the moment Gilderoy's attitude and expression showed how he felt about it. Having gone to the trouble to acquire a first-class secret, he was not going to let it out to anybody, to Dudley least of all. Gilderoy gloated in a stew of intense secretiveness. His oblique soul hugged itself.

"Dudley," the parrot, offered gently, upon which there followed a long silence that could be felt.

"Gilderoy" he added long afterwards, remembering his agreement with himself.

The cat's eyes smiled faintly, but he did not move; his grin merely extended a little sideways; he looked more necromantic, more hermetic than ever, as though the black were a disguise he had worn for the Sabbath. There were sounds of servants moving in the corridor; someone would presently come in to do the room. A maid, indeed, did come in presently, dusting, moving the furniture about, laying the

fire, and talking to the bird at intervals: "Poor old Polly! Naughty bird! 'Ad a bit of a jaunt, didn't you?" Of which the parrot took no notice, nor gave a rejoinder of any sort. He was still "considering" his pal, whom the maid did not even notice.

By his kindly attitude, he had made it easy for the cat to offer an explanation and share his secret, but no explanation was forthcoming. Dudley waited in vain, till at length, when the maid withdrew, leaving the room very much as she had found it, with the exception of the blazing fire, he took another line. He had, of course, discovered long ago exactly how Gilderoy had travelled down. It was as obvious to a bird of Dudley's powers of observation as that the sun was up. Even in his normal state he would have guessed it; in his present condition, all his faculties at their most brilliant, it lay written in big capitals just below his very beak.

He began in Cololensirarthur's voice: "A fellow who really deserves a tip, yet never gets one, is an engine-driver."

The cat's eyes hardened slightly, but this was due probably to his recognition of a voice he dreaded, for he certainly did not understand the actual words any better than their speaker did.

Dudley, adorable bird, then did a simple but extremely clever thing; "Puff! Puff-puff! Puff-puffpuff Gilderoy!" he imitated the children playing trains, and followed this a few minutes later with a long shrill whistle, as the engine started, and then a few more "Puffpuffpuffs"

Nor did he look at Gilderoy while he did it. He merely flung the sounds into the air, as Longfellow's archer shot his arrow, idly, yet knowing they must inevitably come to rest somewhere. The cat, he noticed, just stirred the tip of his tail gently to and fro. The last half-inch moved, once to the left, once to the right, then came to rest again.

"Tike your seats, please!" roared the parrot suddenly. "Tike your seats! Firststoplunnon!" It was a raucous male voice of great volume, and before its echoes had even died away, Gilderoy betrayed himself.

His grin first widened slowly, then passed into a yawn. He rose. He stood on his four feet and arched his back into a semi-circle. His patched eye wandered. A moment later he moved sideways along the wall, obliquely past the table, at a slanting angle round the book-case, and, edging the high fender with tail erect and feet planted delicately, he reached at length the patch of carpet beside the cupboard where sunlight and blazing fire combined to make a pool of delicious warmth. This had been his objective when he started, but the straight line of four feet he had extended into twelve. Inspecting the spot fastidiously, he then turned his head sideways a moment and stared intently up at the cage across the room. His patched eye gazed fixedly at the parrot.

"Purrrrr miaow, purrrrrr miaow!" he produced, his grin widening to its utmost possible limit, as he began kneading the carpet with his feet. He admitted that the game was up; con-

cealing his chagrin admirably, he proved himself a sporting loser. After turning in circles for another minute or two, he then lay down in a ball with a sudden flop, buried his grimey face between yet grimmier paws, and fell asleep. That he did not first wash himself clean proved how tired he was.

"Have a good time," whispered the parrot in a gentle voice, as he turned away, glad that he, at any rate, never need hide himself in the coal bunkers of a locomotive tender. His heart was bursting with the love he felt. The changed angle of his head now involved a glance through the window. The tree, he saw, with a faint shiver of uneasiness again, still stared into the room straight at him. The growing light had changed its aspect, perhaps, a trifle. There was something softer in its stern rigid outline, a fractional lowering of the high proud head. Did not the fierce spikey flowers betray an almost imperceptible droop?

The tree haunted him no less than before, but microscopic changes slipped a new quality into his own emotions. He was aware of pathos.

CHAPTER XXIII

From the dawn of creation the cat has known his place, and he has kept it, practically untamed and unspoiled by man. Of all animals, he alone attains to the Contemplative Life. He regards the wheel of existence from without, like the Buddha. He lives alone, aloft, sublime, in a wise passiveness. . . . It was for these qualities, probably, that the cat was worshipped by the ancient Egyptians.

ANDREW LANG.

THE rest of that day passed somewhat as a dream for Dudley, a dream pierced with lightning flashes of emotion. He remained rapt, concentrated, withdrawn and unusually silent. He seemed withdrawn into his very inmost being, yet while largely ignoring the outer world he was not wholly unconscious of it. The present made demands upon him, for the Day Nursery, with children, governess and servants was a noisy place; and the past, his long, long variegated past, rose urgently before him too. Past and present, indeed, intermingled curiously, so that he was never quite sure where he was.

In this shadow-world three things, however, stood out as intensely real: Molly, Gilderoy, and the Tree. These three items remained vividly significant.

Gilderoy, troubled and affectionate, did not intrude himself, nor interfere. He did not dare, perhaps. He sensed a change, but could not

understand it; he had been sensing it for some time now, increasingly. About his pal hung an atmosphere that puzzled, even faintly alarmed him, an atmosphere of the marvellous. That the parrot had so easily divined his secret; and that the household had not missed him, had not even noticed his absence, was rather bewildering and shattered his self-complacency. He showed less aggressiveness, at any rate, was tender, drew no attention to himself, and behaved, generally, better than ever in his life before. He had washed the dirt away; his coat was clean, his dark nose glistened. He was never out of the room for long, and his patched eye was always turning anxiously in the direction of the parrot.

Molly, for her part, was in constant attention too, divining that something was amiss. Her faithful heart was wrung. There seemed no one who could help her. Not a Vet. was to be found within a day's journey. Her mother "adored" animals, though actually only adoring an extention of herself in creatures she could talk to without being interrupted or answered. Molly, therefore, fell back upon Professor Greene, "M.A., M.D., F.Z.S., etc." Beside the cage she read from the precious book, putting questions to which no answer came except a gentle "Dudley-dudley" and "cuckoo," or merely a shake of the handsome head to indicate that the answer was in the negative.

Plague, Typhoid, Catarrh, Bronchitis, Enteritis, Gout, Pneumonia, Rheumatism, Ringworm, Tuberculosis, all were suggested in turn,

Apoplexy and Convulsions causing her most alarm.

"But there's simply *nothing* a grey parrot can't get," she cried in despair. "Has oo got fatty or amyloid degeneration of the heart, liver, or kidneys, darling?" She begged him to tell her, reading from the little book. "Or is it tuberculosis, my little Saint? 'Birds living in an isolated state, as most parrots in captivity outside zoological gardens do, suffer mostly from the human or bovine type.' Which is it Dudley, dear? It *can't* be bovine, can it?"

"Cuckoo," he breathed gently at her, his eye, however, on the window.

"More or less lameness is produced, and a greater difficulty in maintaining itself on the perch is experienced," she read. "That's gout," she announced, "so it can't be that. You aren't a scrap unsteady, are you?"

He gazed into her face, his lovely body steady as a rock.

"And oo's not 'sneezing with a swollen condition of the eyelids' so it's certainly not catarrh." The symptoms of Plague, Typhoid and Enteritis were also missing; besides, the bird shook his head at all of them, as he did at Lice, Tumours, Ringworm and Rheumatism.

"There was a draught in Buckingham Palace, I expect," she declared. "No King has time to look after himself properly—as—*you*—know, darling, don't you?"

But it was Apoplexy, Convulsions, Fits that alarmed her most, and to her enquiries con-

cerning these, the King Grey Parrot gave no reply of any sort. No sign escaped him.

" ' Epipleptic-like seizures, or fits ',' she read out hesitatingly, " ' are not infrequent in aged parrots due to some disturbance of the central nervous system. . . . In old parrots they are often the expression of some affection of the brain, such as tubercle. . . . A malady characterised by a sudden loss of consciousness,' " . . . The child's voice shook a little as she read on: " ' Commence with a sharp, shrill cry, as if the bird were frightened . . . followed by great agitation and struggling, and end by the bird falling to the bottom of the cage in complete unconsciousness.' "

She came close to the cage and gazed anxiously at her loved pet, who returned the gaze but spoke no word. Anyone less robust in mind must have been affected by this torrent of insanitary suggestion. Dudley, however, knew better. He knew something he didn't know. He knew something he could not communicate even to Molly. The deep internal Ache he felt was due to no mere physical malady. No physical illness had joy mixed up with it, for one thing, and his mysterious Joy still glowed in him like a furnace. His trouble was related to some profound universal process.

" The *tremendous* brain-work," Molly told him, trying to console herself at the same time, " has exhausted you, darling. You are *marvellously* old, of course. It's tubercle you've got, perhaps—just a mild attack."

One bit more she read out: "'If a parrot evinces a desire to take a bath it should be encouraged to do so.'"

Dudley betrayed a passing shiver, so faint that the child did not notice it. But the shiver was not due to anything she said, because the bird had not been listening to her for a very long time. His eye had again caught sight of the Tree upon the lawn, and the great head, he could have sworn, was slightly lower than before. The strange spikey flowers in the face still stared into the room, directly at him. It was this that gave him the shiver. He produced a gentle little cough to hide it.

Molly heard the cough. "Never mind," she comforted him, "it'll soon pass, darling. You'll be better to-morrow. I'll nurse you." She put her lips to the bars. "Kiss mother, Dudley," she cooed, "kiss mother!"

Dudley produced a divine imitation of a kiss that she had taught him. His toes moved, too, opening and shutting.

"Isn't he wonderful, *wonderful*!" cried the delighted child. "And how wise he looks! He knows *everything*. All the troubles of the world lie on his shoulders, but he *never* gives in——"

"*Pourtant il ne dit pas gran'chose*!" put in the governess, who disliked and feared the bird since the day he had paid attention to a finger proffering friendship.

"He's thinking," Molly explained with dignity. "He's going to write his London Adventures,

just as he wrote that splendid Cinema. He went up to make arrangements with his publisher. He had to see a Specialist, too."

Dudley moved one foot, lifting it, holding it in the air.

"There!" she added. "He was just going to say something marvellous when you interrupted him."

"erladyship" also contributed a word or two: "Feeling poorly, are you, dear bird?" She looked intensely sympathetic, but suggested no remedy, no treatment. "I feel like that myself sometimes, too. It's nerves, I think. Only two days ago I . . ." and a long account of her own symptoms followed, the parrot's indisposition entirely forgotten. . . .

The day pursued its dream-like course, and the haunting presence of the staring Tree never for one moment left Dudley's consciousness. That and the strange internal trouble remained, even when not actually thought about.

Gilderoy, solicitous and watchful, a trifle uneasy, too, as already mentioned, kept an eye on his friend, a keenly observant eye; he was never very far away; he slipped in and out of the room, forgetful of himself; he was disturbed. Through his skin and sensitive whiskers, through the bright slit eyes as well, he made sharper observations than anyone else. It was these that caused him anxiety. There was a slight droop in the head and beak he did not like, the short red tail hung oddly, the clutch of the little toes

upon the perch seemed not quite as tight as usual; and the feathers were open, always a sign of something wrong.

He was extraordinarily tactful and unselfish. Occasionally, using gesture or his very brief vocabulary, he dropped remarks, but remarks that insisted upon no answer. They were just to let his pal know that he was in the offing in case of sudden need.

"At the Work, I see. Don't let me interrupt." Dudley didn't.

"Back presently," he mentioned at midday, as he tiptoed delicately sideways towards the door, on his way to forage in the kitchen. "Don't bother." Dudley didn't.

"I'm back," he announced towards evening. "How do you do?" he signalled with his patched eye. Again, Dudley didn't.

The same motionless pose of stone, the same grim, hierophantic silence, the same superb air of profound meditation. The unacknowledged greetings reached him across the length of the room, through the clamour of the turbulent group about the cage as well, but the heroic bird, meeting his trouble alone, fighting his battle single-handed, gave no sign. A touch of awe stole into the cat's queer heart and stayed there.

The hours slipped away, tea-time came and passed, twilight crept over the world outside, the fire in the grate died out, and upon the Tree's white face gleamed a faint unearthly glow. And with the fading away of daylight's open glare,

the Tree moved, it seemed, nearer to the window. Trunk and branches, of course, held stationary; it was the tree's inmost being that shifted mysteriously closer. Dudley, lost in his mighty dreams, was not yet unaware. For his own inmost being, he noticed, moved similarly out to meet it.

"Gilderoy," he murmured almost inaudibly, yet not so low that the watchful tiger failed to catch it.

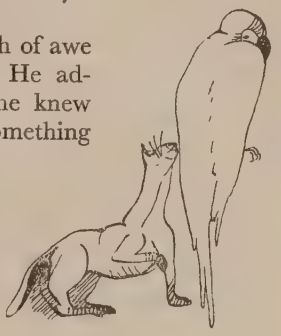
"Purrr miaow," he responded instantly.

He leaped soundlessly upon the table. Moving aside the edge of the shawl with one front paw, he peered inside. The same pose of a marble statue, the same intense withdrawal from the world, he noticed. The droop, however, seemed to him a trifle accentuated. There was an air of mournful resignation. The feathers, more open than before, had less lustre. There was less light, less glitter, in the eyes. A whiff of air proved that the extra covering Molly had spread made the cage nice and warm, the food and drink supply was double the usual amount, too. But the seed and water were untouched. The bird looked old, old, old. He had aged suddenly, dreadfully rather. Gilderoy knew a sudden throbbing pang.

"I feel matey," his tail twitched, with a low sound of affection in his throat. He rubbed himself softly against the bars, but Dudley made no movement on his perch, though he gave a sign at last that he was aware of his friend's presence. He opened his eyes very slowly, but not quite to their full extent. He glanced sideways down his

beak at him, without altering the angle of the head.

"Gilderoy," he murmured very sweetly, "have a good time!" The tone made his terrible beak look almost soft. "Goodbye for the present," he added, and closed his eyes again.



Gilderoy felt the touch of awe in his heart increase. He admitted that the pang he knew was a genuine ache. Something cold went fluttering down his spine as well.

"Dear . . ." reached him from the motionless beak, faint as the puff of a butterfly's wing.

He decided to watch beside his pal all night. It was after midnight, the children long since gone to bed, the room lay dark, the manorouse was silent. Leaving the corner of the shawl still raised, he curled up, none too comfortably, on the narrow space beside the cage, prepared for the long vigil. In a few minutes he was sound asleep. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

Hen Grey Parrots, especially when they are advancing in years, frequently lay eggs, and, in some instances, with great difficulty.—W. T. Greene.

DUDLEY, meanwhile, remained in a condition all his own, a condition of ecstatic bliss. Those who doubt the accuracy of this brief account of what he felt and thought are, again, welcome to their doubts. Only his peers, of an age equal to his own, are competent to judge, and since humans who have reached a hundred years are notoriously gaga, there are none to judge.

The parrot continued just sufficiently aware of the external world to know that it existed. His sense of proportion demanded this: it must not intrude, but it must not wholly disappear. Both feet must stand firm and flat on *terra firma*, no matter to what heights the spirit soared. He was aware, thus, that Gilderoy had intended unselfishly to watch all night beside him, yet had fallen asleep at once; aware that the manorouse with all its inmates lay inert in that state of slumber he called *coma;* that outside, the night stood windless and serene, gazing, waiting, breathless, the big trees upright in attendance, like old bearded kings; and that one smaller Tree, singularly alert, was undergoing an agony of delicious bliss somewhat similar to his own. He was aware of this strange, deep sinister kinship between himself and this amazing tree. It had intensified.

He was aware, in a word, of his precise relation to the Cosmos at this moment, and knew that the Cosmos was similarly aware. Expectancy stood on tiptoe everywhere, from the tiny blades of grass to the incandescent fires of the furthest extra-galactic nebulae. The spikey flowers on the Tree, as the sleek feathers on himself, all pointed the same way, electric with some mysterious secret agony each shared.

Something all this time was drawing nearer, nearer, and the universe, since the universe must be affected by it, stood waiting at attention. It would prove a climax of stupendous kind. His WORK, his LIFE-WORK, would achieve its consummation, and all his striving and suffering of a hundred years would justify themselves. His whole being would burst into flower, fulfilling the purpose for which it had been called into existence. He and the Tree would together enter Paradise.

"It's all a Magical Show," he murmured to himself, referring to the universe. "A glittering Magical Show. And I—you and I——" his eye including the tree—"are both in at the finish!"

Realizing that he was thus caught up in the Swell of this vast Cosmic Tide, swept forward irresistibly on its majestic awful crest, merged in the Creative purpose of Life and Evolution, whatever these might be, he now knew his former shrinking horror of the sinister Tree turned into flaming love. The King Grey Parrot on his little perch, the tall staring Tree upon the mid-

night lawn, stood hand in hand. And this sweet intimacy now suddenly brought back its name.

"*Aloe!*" he cried, moved into faint, trembling utterance. "*I love you!*"

If the Tree gave no sign by way of sound or movement, there was recognition, for a wave of light passed exquisitely across the hanging face and vanished. Dudley perceived it. He tried to say more, but the attempt seemed beyond his powers. Phrases like jewelled swords flashed through his mind, but he discarded them, unable to seize them in their perfect form.

"erladyships notatome," he whispered with an effort, then desisted, sinking back into that uncharacterised bliss wherein he knew himself one with all things everywhere, himself and the Aloe, therefore, also one. This Brotherhood he distinctly realized. At the same time, he felt a little weaker.

"Brother," he sighed inaudibly, lest the increasing feebleness rob him of the power of utterance altogether, "it's coming to me, as it has come to you. It has taken a hundred years. . . ."

He slipped back into his agony of ecstatic joy. Outside, the night proceeded with her gorgeous ceremony, the owls flew hunting past the silent house, the dew fell soundlessly, the grass and flowers grew, the stars, now paling a little, stared down from their appalling distances. The hush of expectancy deepened with almost painful intensity. The universe stood ready, waiting for the Something that drew every moment nearer.

Dudley, in the inmost heart of this expectancy, waited too; he, too, was ready. The Event he knew, yet did not know, crept remorselessly closer. He approached a gorgeous climax, if with a divine indifference, yet also with a divine poise due to his welcome of the inevitable. If he felt a certain weariness, an increasing enfeeblement, that, he reflected, was only natural. It was an exhausting business, he told himself, but worth while.

"*Ab ovo*," escaped him, inspirationally it seemed, as a faint spasm made him tremble. "Can't come in. I'm dressing. . . ."

His appearance was superb, magnificent; he looked, what indeed he was, the Archetypal Parrot. He knew himself a microcosm, *the* microcosm. The stars sang in his breast. His breath was flowers, his nerves were honey, he was flooded with divine compassion. His eyes, turned inwards rather, glowed with the sweet fires of that lost southern sunshine he had yearned for during ninety-nine years of fog and rain. And the understanding Tree, sharing memories of similar kind, and similar period, too, stood in loving sympathy beside him.

"Brother!" slipped poignantly through his mind, "we are in agony together. But it is a creative, a productive agony!" He heard the night wind rustle through the spikey blooms for answer.

And while the secret Cosmic Processes moved relentlessly forward, Gilderoy, a warm red ball, lay tight asleep. His sides rose and fell in sym-

pathy with the vaster tides outside him, yet undoubtedly he slept. Close to the cage he lay, he could not have been closer to his pal without being inside; his face, sideways between the paws, was scrunched up against the very bars. And the Moment crept nearer and ever nearer.

Another spasm ran through the trim, feathered body on the perch.

"Ugh!" gasped Dudley, though, forgetful of his own pain, his eye turned affectionately upon his sleeping pal. He tottered a little, then instantly recovered his balance.

It was a solemn moment. Swiftly, he reviewed his whole existence.

"I have warmed both claws at the fires of life," he murmured. "I have mastered life. I have been a bird of action." The years of somnolent inactivity he ignored because he forgot them. "One is," he remembered, "what one thinks he is."

Widening the space between his clutching toes with extreme caution, lest deep emotion endanger balance, he gave a tiny cough, and observed that Gilderoy's whiskers twitched. His sleep, after all, was but a cat-sleep. He had kept his faithful vigil.

"Yes, a Magical Show," resumed the King Grey Parrot, weakening obviously, "But it has never humbugged me. On the contrary—I—humbugged it. I moulded it to my will." Aware that the Tree and Gilderoy both listened, he wanted to say more, but power failed him. "Whew . . . !" half whistle and half sigh left his beak, as a pain like

cramp shot through his lowest tummy. "It hurts, Molly!"

Despite the pain he visualised the whole grand structure of the Universe, aware that almost any moment now he was about to contribute to it.

"I am to add my little brick," he realized, yet with bursting pride and joy.

His experiences during these long hours lie actually beyond the reach of words. . . .

The dawn at length broke, pink and pearly. Seeing it, Dudley tried to meet it with a smile. But his rigid features were not made for smiles. The brave greeting with which he wished to face the Cosmos on this significant dawn could not form itself upon that iron beak. And the marvellous bird, his heart alight as the final throes approached, at last understood why this small satisfaction was denied him. The flea was made small, lest with its blood-thirsty nature it devastate the earth. His own beauty, similarly, with the power to smile added to it, must have ravished all who saw it out of their senses utterly.

This flash of insight brought consolation even at a moment of so august crisis. It was followed by a short, sharp spasm, by a second, and by a third. They shook the perfect little body, they weakened it still further. Dudley, now a trifle unsteady on his perch, gave a heave, a groan, a gurgle of exhaustion. He trembled from head to foot—waiting in intense expectancy. But nothing happened. The Moment was not quite yet.

The Sun was up, the Moment had arrived.

Upon the pinnacle of life he stood. He turned his gaze sideways down that formidable beak. It fell on the interior of his rather dirty cage, now turned into glory by the shaft of golden light. Emotion rose to a tempest in him, swelling, bursting, irresistible.

"I wonder," occurred to him, "If I've swallowed anything?" He searched for words, for sentences, for exclamations, but to his amazement, his chagrin too, could discover none. Even the Latin tags, usually inexhaustible, failed him for the first time in memory.

"What's up?" he managed to ask himself, his breath noisily irregular suddenly. He gazed about him, tactfully diverting attention from his little vulgar lapse.

"The sun!" He managed this aloud, answering his own question. The first shaft of sunrise fell like a living sword into his cage, into his very face.

"O Halleluia . . . !" he tried to cry aloud, but the storm of feeling that swept his gullet allowed only a faint and trembling little voice to issue in "O Hell. . . ." It was all he could manage. His balance became insecure. His clutch lost its perfect touch. He wobbled.

"Dudley will now get down, Gilderoy," he contrived with a tremendous effort, but with unfailing courage. He waddled sideways along the perch, slowly, very cautiously, till he reached the end. He tottered, but he did not miss his step. Gilderoy, now standing up, both eyes

staring intently, inserted a paw between the bars. And Dudley, touching the paw softly with one claw, but gripping the bars as well with his beak, lowered himself painfully to the floor. He lurched. His strength seemed ebbing. The cage shook. The shawl slid off.

"All night," signalled Gilderoy, staring at him, distressed, a little frightened, "I have stuck close." His whole body conveyed the affection that filled his skin to its very brim.

Dudley, now standing on the floor of the cage, cocked his head across one shoulder with difficulty, and returned the stare. Into his eye, which had become increasingly dull and lustreless, flashed a last radiant, fiery light. He gurgled. His small body heaved convulsively. Love burned quenchless, inexhaustible. He shook from head to foot. Prostration was at hand.

"I've done my little job," he murmured dauntlessly, and extremely low. "I've served the Race. Gildy . . . " the whisper fluttered "My time—*our* time," as his glance included the window through which the Tree loomed equally magnificent in the dawn—"has come!"

The cat pressed closer, rubbing his body softly against the bars. He was intensely agitated. The green eyes moistened.

"My WORK," mumbled the parrot, more faintly still as the cramps increased in severity, "is—consummated . . . !"

His breath failed him. He trembled violently. One word more he managed to utter, if almost soundlessly:

"*Finis coronat opus* . . . !"

There was a sharp plop. A small white egg, shiney, of perfect shape, modelled divinely to its tapering end, and similar to a ring-dove's, lay on the floor of the cage.

Gilderoy stared fixedly at it. The hair stood on end, it seemed, upon his back. Both eyes were swimming.

"A *she* !" he signalled in blank amazement.

His pal, after a brief convulsion, lay down in the sand beside her egg. Silent, motionless, she lay, the eyes half closed, the claws loose, the thin little legs crossed neatly, the beak slightly open. The sunlight turned the lovely figure into gold. Gilderoy, trembling, pushed a velvet paw between the bars and touched the familiar red tail. He could just reach it. The beak moved almost imperceptibly. Almost inaudibly the whisper issued:

"Gilderoy . . . dear . . . have a good time. . . . Good-bye for the present . . . !"

There was a sound outside upon the lawn. A white spikey flower loosened by the dawn wind, fluttered to the ground. It was followed by a second and a third. As the last flower fell, taking the entire strange face with it, a gentle sigh passed from the motionless beak on the floor of the cage.

The eyes then closed. Gilderoy withdrew his paw. For some minutes he stole to and fro, uttering short plaintive purrs, rubbing himself against the bars. Then he sat down, miawing piteously, kneading the table with his front feet

staring, staring at the silent, motionless little body of his friend that looked now so much smaller than in life. Then, presently, finding no response, the purring and the miaowing stopped; he no longer kneaded; he turned his attention to the egg.

He gazed and gazed and gazed. Some fifteen minutes later he came, apparently, to a conclusion of his own:

"It's a cooker!" he decided.

Without another look, he left the room, he left the house, he became what he had been before the Great Friendship entered his life—a stray, alien, independent cat that walked by himself across the universe.

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